United Nations S/PV.8396

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8396th meeting
Tuesday, 13 November 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Ms. Vaverka
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2421 (2018) (S/2018/975)

Twentieth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2018/976)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2421 (2018) (S/2018/975)

Twentieth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2018/976)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Iraq to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/975, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2421 (2018), as well as to document S/2018/976, which contains the twentieth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013).

I now give the floor to Mr. Kubiš.

Mr. Kubiš: Following the certification of the election results on 19 August, the Government formation process moved forward with the election of Mohammad Al-Halbousi as Speaker of the Council of Representatives, on 15 September, and Barham Salih as President of Iraq, on 2 October, who then nominated Mr. Adil Abdul-Mahdi as Prime Minister-designate.

On 24 October, the Iraqi Parliament reviewed the new governmental programme, endorsed 14 out of 22 Cabinet ministers, and confirmed Mr. Abdul-Mahdi as Prime Minister. Of the five sovereign ministries, Finance, Foreign Affairs and Oil were endorsed, but the ministries of Defence and Interior are yet to be allocated. No female or minority candidates were appointed to ministerial positions, but the Prime Minister intends to consider them for governmental posts and other key positions in subsequent rounds of Government formation.

While the Government formation process has not been without controversies, the political blocs have demonstrated a willingness to act in support of the Prime Minister. Competition and differences have been largely political and not sectarian, and in this way they represent a break from the past. The guidance of the supreme Shia religious authority, Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani, has significantly influenced the process. The main negotiations with Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi have been led by cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr of the Sairoun Alliance and Mr. Hadi Al-Ameri of the Fatah Alliance on behalf of their coalitions — Islah and Binaa, respectively. All of these primary partners and political forces now share a responsibility for creating an enabling environment for the new Prime Minister and Government to deliver on its programme, and for its stability. The support of all the political forces represented in Parliament, including those who will now be in the opposition for the first time since 2003, will be essential. Barring this, Iraq's political forces and leaders will fail their people.

The Government's programme, which includes advisory inputs from the United Nations, represents a general outline of a national project to respond to the needs and demands of the Iraqi people. As stated in the programme, its focus and pillar should be the citizen. The programme outlines specific plans for reforms, investment and the private sector with a view to transitioning Iraq from a crisis context to sustainable development; recommends steps to tackle corruption across all sectors; and sets out a framework to guide the planning and work of each ministry. In addition to delivering tangible improvements in the daily lives of Iraqi citizens, a key focus area of the programme includes job creation for the unemployed, young people in particular.

The rehabilitation and reconstruction of liberated areas and the return of internally displaced persons are also key priorities. The programme aims at strengthening security, fighting terrorism and enhancing law and order and the rule of law, among others, by putting all arms under the strict control of the State. It also stresses the prevention of militia formations outside the framework of the State and the withdrawal of troops from the cities. The programme confirms that special attention will be given to resolving pending challenges with the Kurdistan region, including the issues of

budget allocation and financial resources, oil and disputed areas.

I commend the exemplary democratic transfer of power between the outgoing Prime Minister, Haider Al Abadi, and incoming Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi. At the handover ceremony on 25 October, Mr. Al Abadi recalled the achievements of his Government in defeating Da'esh and uniting the country based on the Constitution, at a time when the economic situation had deteriorated owing to deep-rooted corruption and a massive decrease in oil prices. He recalled the return of millions of displaced families to liberated areas and the establishment of a national army and security forces. He also noted improved relations with all of Iraq's neighbours, including the Arab countries. Finally, he underlined that political processes in Iraq have witnessed a gradual departure from sectarian approaches and rhetoric. For all of this, he and his Government, the Kurdistan Regional Government, diverse armed forces and formations, and the people of Iraq deserve acknowledgment and gratitude.

Iraq must now build on these foundations. The new Government intends to start immediately, particularly on the delivery of services and jobs, reforming and energizing the economy, and fighting corruption and administrative red tape. In this regard, Iraq will require and counts on the continued support of the international community. We must not let the country down.

On 30 October, the results of the Kurdistan region parliamentary elections, held on 30 September, were approved. The first session of the new Kurdistan regional parliament took place on 6 November, but failed to elect its speaker and the two deputies. The dominant Kurdistan Democratic Party now intends to consult with all Kurdistan region political parties, notably the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, on the Government formation.

The new Government of Iraq intends to introduce robust measures to further improve and achieve sustainable security throughout the country, intensifying efforts to uproot Da'esh terrorist cells to counter this insurgency. Reports of the arrests of Da'esh terrorists and their leaders or on the elimination of sleeper cells and hideouts are issued almost daily.

Security measures put in place for the Arba'een pilgrimage were successful. Among the 15 million pilgrims, close to 2 million foreign visitors were recorded to have legally and safely entered Iraq. Efforts to disturb this massive movement of people failed.

Most of Da'esh's movements in recent months have reportedly been through the desert joining central Iraq and its Anbar and Ninawa provinces to the western border with the Syria. In response, Iraq has deployed thousands of troops on its border with that neighbouring country to curb Da'esh, which remains in control of several areas across the border in the Syrian Deir ez-Zor province. Also, Da'esh remains active in some other Iraqi provinces, notably in Kirkuk, Salah ad-Din and Diyala.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) continues to advocate justice and accountability for international crimes. On 6 November, UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights jointly launched a report entitled *Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in Territory Formerly Controlled by ISIL*. At least 202 mass graves have been discovered in Iraq, and they are believed to contain the remains of many thousands of victims of atrocities perpetrated by Da'esh. I am pleased to report that the Special Adviser and Head of the Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh, Mr. Karim Khan, arrived in Iraq on 30 October.

In October, UNAMI established a women's advisory group on reconciliation and politics in Iraq, which will serve as a political inclusion mechanism to ensure that the voices, concerns and experiences of Iraqi women are included in political processes that shape national reconciliation based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity and non-discrimination.

Nearly two years after the defeat of Da'esh by Iraqi security forces and coalition allies, more than 1.9 million Iraqis remain displaced, primarily in the north and west of the country. Although 4 million people have returned home since the end of the conflict, the rate of return has decreased significantly. Humanitarian actors and the UNAMI senior women's protection adviser are also concentrating on how to best strengthen the centrality of protection around women and children with perceived affiliations with extremist groups.

A critical barrier to the return of internally displaced persons is that the need for residential buildings to be cleared of mines by mine action actors remains unmet. The Funding Facility for Stabilization

reached a significant milestone, having now completed 1,517 projects across all nine sectors of work in the five liberated governorates of the country. There are 245 new projects already tendered, but they will not be implemented without additional donor support. We also urge the Government to begin making its own contributions to donor-funded international development programmes, including those under the Facility.

The need for concrete results in public projects beyond the current focus on liberated areas is perhaps most evident in the southern city and province of Basra. There, a combination of water scarcity and high levels of contamination in supplies of drinking water led to more than 100,000 being admitted to hospital with symptoms of gastroenteritis between mid-August and mid-October.

On 28 October, the Government of Iraq chaired the first formal meeting of the Executive Committee on Recovery, Reconstruction and Development. This high-level committee is mandated to provide a coordination platform for strategic guidance on national priorities to take forward the work set out at the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, held in Kuwait in February. This signals the Government's determined shift towards development and investment.

I am delighted to report that on 11 and 13 November, respectively, after over a year of preparations, President Salih and representatives of the Iraqi Ministry for Foreign Affairs delivered to the Kuwaiti Ministry for Foreign Affairs numerous items of property taken during the invasion of Kuwait, including over 2,300 books, an archive of Kuwaiti television videotapes, a sword and a valuable painting. I welcome this clear indication of commitment by the Government of Iraq to resolving the complex file of outstanding issues with Kuwait. When I met the new Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Mr. Mohamed Alhakim, on 5 November, he assured me that he would give the greatest attention to and support for efforts on this important file.

In conclusion, as this is my last report to the Security Council in my current capacity, I would like to express my gratitude to you, Mr. President, your predecessors and the members of the Security Council for the support you have kindly provided to me during the three years and nine months I have served in my post. I would also like to express my highest appreciation to UNAMI and United Nations country team staff for their dedication, professionalism, proactive efforts and unwavering commitment to working in support of UNAMI and United Nations mandates serving Iraq and its people. I would also like to express my gratitude to and appreciate for Ms. Alice Walpole, my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance, and Ms. Marta Ruedas, my Deputy Special Representative for Humanitarian Affairs and Development, for their cooperation, capable leadership and management of United Nations activities across Iraq.

Finally, I would like to warmly welcome my successor, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and wish her success in leading the Mission and in helping Iraq to achieve a durable and sustainable peace, stability and prosperity for its people. I encourage the authorities and society of Iraq to offer Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert the same generous support and cooperation that they have shown to me during my tenure. I have the honour of serving the United Nations and Iraq during a particularly difficult period that has against all odds and scepticism ended well, with promising future prospects for the country and its people. Iraq is a success, a positive story in a region marked by many negative trends and developments. The United Nations in Iraq has shown its relevance and will continue to build on the firm foundations of its partnership with Iraq and its people.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Kubiš for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I want to express our special thanks to Special Representative Kubiš for his comprehensive briefing on the latest developments in Iraq, to congratulate him on a successful three years and nine months of service, and to thank him for his exception leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) during this pivotal chapter in Iraq's history. On a personal note, having worked with him in Iraq for the first half of his tenure, I wish to thank him for his tireless efforts in very challenging circumstances and for his consistent wise counsel and friendship over these years. His ability to engage with Iraqi stakeholders from all walks of life has illustrated for all of us UNAMI's vital role in facilitating critical political dialogue and showed the great potential that UNAMI has to make positive impact in Iraq. We, along with the rest of the Security

Council, also look forward to working closely with his successor, Special Representative-designate Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, when she begins her tenure in December.

Since the Council's last UNAMI briefing (see S/PV.8324), Iraq has a new President and Prime Minister, which deserves the Security Council's congratulations. Iraq's new Government is poised to make a serious of important decisions that will set the course of the country's history for decades to come. We encourage the new Government to focus on tackling corruption and delivering essential services to all of its people, including its many diverse communities of all ethnicities and faiths. We also call on Iraq's new leaders to promote the participation and representation of women at all levels.

The United States has pledged to work closely with President Salih, Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi and Council of Representatives Speaker Al-Halbousi to deliver stability, security and prosperity for all Iraqis. Much work remains to be done and bold leadership will be required. The credibility of the new Government hinges on providing access to jobs, clean water and electricity. It is vital that the Government deliver on those essential services as swiftly as possible.

We also call on the new Government to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons who suffered so greatly from terror at the hands of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams (ISIS). The atrocities committed by ISIS cannot go unpunished, and we call on the new Government to work closely with the newly established United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL to swiftly begin evidence-based investigations on the ground, as mandated by resolution 2379 (2017).

As Iraq continues to grapple with terrorist threats, even after the defeat of ISIS, we must remember that no threat of violence can reverse the spirit of the Iraqi people. We are encouraged by the stories of the many Iraqis who have returned to their homes and are beginning to rebuild their communities. The UNAMI mandate underscores the importance of supporting Iraq and meeting the needs of all Iraqis, including women, youth and members of all religious and ethnic groups. We strongly encourage Iraq's new leaders to work closely with UNAMI to address the unique needs of those groups and individuals as part and parcel of the broader national and community-level reconciliation effort that Iraq needs to undertake. Iraq's new leaders should also work closely with UNAMI to help create the conditions that will allow the Iraqi people to shape their own future, free of outside interference.

Iraq has once again entered a key moment in its history, making major strides towards a more stable, secure and democratic future. Now Iraq's leaders have the task of showing that they can deliver on the high expectations of their people. The United States stands ready to support Iraq in achieving that goal.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like at the outset to thank Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for his valuable briefing.

Despite the many challenges that Iraq is facing in the post-Da'esh period, the Iraqi people have proven themselves capable of rebuilding their country and of confronting the challenges facing them in order to strengthen the principles of democracy in their country, as reflected in the mid-May parliamentary elections. The outcome of the elections has been accepted and confirmed and the country has seen a peaceful transfer of power, which has allowed a new Iraqi Government to be established within the time frame set by the Constitution.

I take this opportunity to sincerely congratulate, on behalf of the State of Kuwait, the leadership, the Government and the people of Iraq on the election of His Excellency Mr. Barham Salih as President of the Republic of Iraq and His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Al-Halbousi as Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the appointment of His Excellency Mr. Adil Abdul-Mahdi as the Prime Minister to head the new Government. We are fully confident that all of them are trustworthy, and we wish them every success as they make efforts in the best interests of our brotherly Iraq in order to fulfil all the aspirations of its people, who deserve to live in a stable, prosperous and safe State. We hope that the full Cabinet of the new Government will be appointed soon because the post-election phase is very critical in Iraq. We believe that those positive developments are promising and reflect positively on the situation in Iraq and indeed in the entire region.

It is high time for Iraq to be able to recover from the painful tragedies that it suffered over the past few years at the hands of the terrorist group Da'esh. The State

of Kuwait renews its solidarity with the leadership, the people and the Government of Iraq in their efforts to defeat terrorism and entrench Iraqi national unity, while preserving the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country. We were delighted to host the Iraqi President in Kuwait just two days ago, which speaks volumes of the links that tie our two countries together and allow us to move sincerely forward together to serve the interests of our two peoples.

Allow me now to address two points: first, UNAMI responsibilities under its mandate; and secondly, the commitments pertaining to the Kuwaiti and third-party nationals who have been reported missing, and the lost Kuwaiti property, including the national archives of Kuwait.

With regard to the first point, I would like to commend the United Nations staff in Iraq for their tireless efforts to forge a promising future for that country through its ongoing advice and assistance to the Government and the people of Iraq, as well as all stakeholders in the framework of a partnership that brings together UNAMI and the United Nations country team. That partnership is apparent in many much-needed areas.

In that regard, I underline the continued full support of the State of Kuwait to and its cooperation with the Mission and the country team to allow them to fully carry out their tasks. The aim is to meet the needs of Iraq. We are very well aware of the scale of the major challenges facing Iraq. That requires the full support of the international community in order to ensure its stability and security.

We are completely convinced that security and stability cannot be achieved without sustainable development in its various dimensions. We will continue to provide all kinds of support to the brotherly Iraqi people so that they can meet their needs.

The International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq was hosted by Kuwait in February, with the cooperation of Iraq, the United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank. The pledges we made at the Conference demonstrated international and regional solidarity with our Iraqi brothers to heal the wounds inflicted by Da'esh. I refer to the programmes of rehabilitation and reconstruction for cities liberated from terrorism. We shoulder our responsibilities towards the humanitarian situation of our Iraqi brothers. That is a response to the humanitarian appeals of the United Nations to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people, particularly displaced persons, in order to let Iraq achieve its future vision of a new and united country.

Our concern today is that terrorist groups continue to pose a threat to the security and stability of Iraq and the region, despite the fact that Da'esh has been defeated. That is why we must all pull together, step up our efforts and take more critical measures in order to ensure that the perpetrators of those horrifying crimes are accountable and brought to justice. The State of Kuwait counts on the efforts made by the Iraqi authorities to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of those terrorist acts, in coordination and cooperation with the international mechanism involved in collecting evidence, which was established by resolution 2379 (2017). Those are critical steps within the broader framework of the global counter-terrorism strategy.

I turn now to my second point regarding the commitments made to the Kuwaiti and third-party nationals who have been reported missing, and the lost Kuwaiti property, including the national archives of Kuwait. That is an important issue due to its legitimate human and legal dimensions. The State of Kuwait appreciates the efforts that have been made by the Security Council to implement all the remaining commitments pursuant to its relevant resolutions since the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. We commend the firm resolve of Iraq to meet all its international commitments towards the State of Kuwait in that regard. We are ready to provide the support that Iraq needs in order to speed up the implementation of the remaining commitments stipulated in the relevant Council resolutions.

At the same time, we urge UNAMI to continue to fully discharge its mandate pertaining to the missing prisoners and the return of Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, pursuant to resolution 2107 (2013). The steps that have been taken so far are insufficient and no significant progress has been made since 2004.

We underscore that the State of Kuwait has spared no effort to support measures over the past 28 years to uncover the fate of its missing Kuwaitis and other third-country individuals. In that regard, we cannot but commend the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross in chairing the tripartite mechanism, including its Technical Subcommittee. At the same time, I thank the United Kingdom, France and the United States for their recent positive contributions by providing the Subcommittee with satellite images

and maps dating back to the relevant period from 1990 to 1992. We hope that those contributions will yield positive results on the ground.

I should like to draw the Council's attention to another issue related to the remaining commitments, namely, the question of Kuwaiti assets, including the national archives, which represent our historic wealth and an important part of the national heritage and memory of the Kuwaiti people. Unfortunately, we do not know what has become of them. We therefore hope to follow a new and innovative approach with a view to making progress in that area. At the same time, we welcome the efforts of the Iraqi authorities to return to the State of Kuwait the books and other assets that have been found, despite taking more than a year to accomplish that.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait appreciates the valuable efforts of Mr. Kubiš as Head of UNAMI and Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq. We commend his dedication and personal commitment over the past three years, and wish him every success in his future endeavours.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I join others in thanking Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his briefing, which comes at a critical time for Iraq. I also welcome his personal commitment to doing the job that he is leaving and that he carried out with exemplary determination in difficult circumstances. I will discuss the latest developments relating to the electoral process, the remaining challenges that must be met so as to achieve a stable, inclusive and prosperous Iraq, and France's full support for those efforts and the work of the United Nations.

First, as Ján Kubiš just made clear, we have seen a decisive transformation in Iraq this past year. Iraq was able to defeat Da'esh militarily and meet the challenge presented by parliamentary elections and political transition. Despite difficulties, the peaceful organization of the electoral process within the timeframe set by the Constitution — one year after the military victory over Da'esh — is testimony to the country's recovery. We welcome that progress and the appointment of new Iraqi authorities.

Despite the tense regional and social environment, the formation of the Government has demonstrated a sense of responsibility on the part of the various actors during the transition period. The relevant figures who have emerged following the process, including the Prime Minister, will be solid assets for the future. We hope that the confirmation of the remaining eight ministers will take place soon. The new Iraqi Government must concentrate without delay on the road map for electoral, economic and financial reform, as well as the reform of the security sector, all of which are imperative.

Secondly, if that auspicious dynamic is to continue, much remains to be done. First of all, Iraq's stability, which is crucial to preventing the resurgence of Da'esh in any form, is a major issue for the region and our own national security. We will remain mobilized in the fight against terrorism, alongside the Iraqi security forces, and in support for the international coalition's efforts to counter Da'esh to end that persistent threat definitively.

On the ground, Iraq continues to contend with nearly 2 million internally displaced persons, who must continue to be provided with assistance. The primary goal of the international community — the stabilization of the country — entails assisting with the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons and ensuring security, mine clearance and restoring basic services, without which the prospects for sustainable return will remain dim. More generally, however, as France has continued to emphasize, only national reconciliation and inclusive governance serving the interests of all sectors of Iraqi society will make it possible to defeat terrorism. France is committed to helping the new Iraqi Government meet the challenges of national reconciliation and inclusive governance.

I stress the importance of women's role in the political process. France calls for progress in that area. I also recall the important role that the Iraqi justice system, which must be seen as exemplary and beyond reproach, must play in ensuring that all those responsible for crimes be tried with respect for the rule of law. We also encourage ongoing efforts to resume negotiations with Erbil so as to resolve pending disputes. The stability of the country requires that the Kurds be afforded their rightful place within a united Iraq that respects its own diversity. In that regard, France commends the measures put in place by Ján Kubiš, which were decisive in resolving the crisis triggered by the independence referendum.

The priority that we must collectively accord to the reconstruction of the country is one of the keys to its future. Iraq will be able to consolidate its institutions only if the Government moves quickly to implement the recovery and resilience programme established at the

Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, which the entire international community has supported. I recall that Iraq will be incapable of rebuilding itself if it is held hostage to regional tensions. Dissociation is an imperative both for Iraqi leaders and for external Powers.

Lastly, I reiterate that France fully supports the people of Iraq in facing those challenges, which are linked to their sovereignty and unity. France has donated nearly €60 million to Iraq since 2017, in addition to a budget loan of 430€ million. That aid is based on responding to humanitarian needs and supporting the stabilization of territories liberated from Da'esh control. France also wishes to fully support Iraq during its reconstruction phase, which has just begun, and will remain fully engaged with the Iraqi people in the coming months.

In conclusion, I commend the role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) under the leadership of Ján Kubiš, particularly over the past several months. Iraq is stronger and more inclusive and stable today, and together we can all thank Ján Kubiš for his crucial contribution to that progress and encourage UNAMI to stay the course in according priority to supporting governance and national reconciliation.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for his excellent briefing, and expresses its appreciation for the work that he has accomplished since 2015. As his mandate draws to an end, it is an agreeable duty for us to express our gratitude and admiration to him and his entire UNAMI team.

Following the successful holding of parliamentary elections on 12 May, the Iraqi Council of Representatives freely elected Mr. Barham Salih as President of the Republic on 10 October. The appointment of Mr. Adil Abdul-Mahdi as Prime Minister will allow the timely formation of a Government that will address, inter alia, security issues, including the threat that the Islamic State continues to pose in Iraq. Moreover, the official visit by President Salih to Kuwait on 10 November led to discussions on strengthening relations between the two States. Similarly, the outcome of the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, organized under the auspices of the United Nations, Iraq and Kuwait, is likely to further consolidate such cooperation in the region.

Côte d'Ivoire hopes that the new Government, which is the product of various consultations, will create conditions conducive to genuine reconciliation among the Iraqi people and lasting stability, while respecting unity and sociopolitical and ethnic diversity. The Government must spare no effort to meet its many challenges, which will include, among other things, finding sustainable solutions to the issue of the dignified return of internally displaced persons by providing them with basic administrative and social services, while ramping up the reconstruction of conflict-affected areas and ensuring women's equal representation in institutions and decision-making structures.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the constructive dialogue between Iraq's central Government and the authorities of the Kurdistan autonomous region, which is aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the dispute arising from the 25 September 2017 referendum on Kurdistan's self-determination. The dialogue initiative has enabled the Erbil and Sulaymaniyah airports to reopen for international flights. My country hopes that the next meetings between the Prime Minister of Iraq and Mr. Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan region, will finally enable them to settle the question of the contested internal borders and the status of Kirkuk province, as well as the management of oil and gas and the revenue from those resources.

My delegation welcomes the efforts of the Government of Iraq and the international community to prosecute the perpetrators of serious crimes. We also welcome the visit to Iraq on 30 April by the needs assessment mission of the Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/Da'esh, as well as the appointment on 31 May of Mr. Karim Asad Ahmad Khan to head the Investigative Team, pursuant to the relevant provisions of Security Council resolution 2379 (2017). The recent discovery of 200 mass graves containing thousands of bodies in areas previously under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is convincing evidence of the urgent need for the Investigative Team to intensify its work on the ground and create a national database similar to those established in Bosnia and Rwanda in order to identify the victims of such barbarity as soon as possible.

My country urges the international community to continue focusing sustained attention on the reconstruction efforts undertaken by Iraq's central authorities with regard to implementing its security-sector reform programme, so that the country can maintain professional defence and security forces that are committed to respecting the rule of law and human rights.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Historically, Iraq has been an important factor for stability in the Middle East. Russia supports constructive steps aimed at strengthening Iraq's domestic political situation and ensuring the country's security and socioeconomic development in full respect for its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We note the enormous contribution of the United Nations and Special Representative Kubiš in stabilizing the situation in Iraq. We know that this is a result of his ability to establish constructive and mutually respectful dialogue between all the political stakeholders in Iraq.

We were pleased to see that the parliamentary elections held in May culminated in the election of the Republic's top leadership. We emphasize that Russia respects the sovereign choice of the Iraqi people and we urge everyone to do the same.

We welcome our Iraqi partners' successful and decisive efforts to combat the terrorist threat. Much has been done on the counter-terrorism front, and the so-called caliphate of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has been dealt a crushing blow. We believe that this was achieved partly thanks to the uncompromising war on terrorism being waged in neighbouring Syria. Russia has contributed to that effort. But despite these successes, the security situation in Iraq remains fragile. ISIL members remain active in a number of Iraqi provinces, hiding in areas that are hard to reach or posing as refugees or locals. Terrorist attacks are still their weapon of choice. We categorically condemn any acts of terror, express our sympathies with the Government and the people of Iraq and the families of victims, and wish the wounded a speedy recovery. We believe that the only effective way to combat this challenge is by coordinating our counter-terrorism efforts. The initiative of President Putin of Russia to create a broad coalition of States to fight terrorism is as relevant as ever.

Restoring the economy, the social arena and national livelihoods generally is crucial for the Iraqi leadership. The international community should help Baghdad to develop comprehensive measures aimed at improving socioeconomic conditions, and in that regard we acknowledge the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq held in February in Kuwait.

We want to draw attention to the priority of providing assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons, which, incidentally, is highlighted in the Secretary-General's latest report on the situation in Iraq (S/2018/975). Needless to say, it must be done jointly and without double standards, whether in Iraq, Syria or any other similar context.

Russia has been supporting the Iraqi leadership's efforts on the security front and on long-term normalization of the situation both politically and practically. We are helping to strengthen the Iraqi army and implementing effective collaboration on regional security issues within the framework of the quadrilateral coordination centre in Baghdad, and we are expanding bilateral trade and economic ties. We welcome Baghdad's use of bilateral communication channels with partners in the region, its implementation of a good-neighbourliness policy and normalization of relations with regional Powers. Baghdad and Kuwait's willingness to work to resolve as soon as possible the legacy of all the problematic issues resulting from the first Gulf War deserves particular support. As United Nations High-level Coordinators at various stages of the process, Russia's Ambassadors Vorontsov and Tarasov also contributed to resolving this humanitarian issue.

We are concerned about the possible negative effects on Iraq's fragile internal political situation as a result of the artificial intensification of the situation surrounding the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iraq has the right to build and develop normal relations with its Iranian neighbours, and no one has the right to undermine those relations. We want to emphasize once again the importance of launching dialogue mechanisms in the region rather than sanctions and threats, especially since the experience of that kind of cooperation exists and has been developed.

Russia will continue to play an active role in the Middle East, based on its historically friendly and healthy relations with Iraq and other States of the region. We are open to collaborating with regional and international partners. Our shared efforts would

be seriously helped by the promotion of a security and cooperation architecture based on the assumption that any issues that might arise would be resolved through mutually respectful dialogue, not threats of force.

We would like to conclude on a positive note with regard to the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq. We believe that it should continue to prioritize assisting in the promotion of the national reconciliation processes that are essential to achieving the country's long-term stability. For our part, in all our contacts with all of Iraq's political forces, we encourage them to unite their efforts through inclusive dialogue aimed at reaching consensus agreements that take the interests of all ethnic and religious groups into consideration. We want to express our gratitude to all the Mission staff working in difficult conditions, and personally to Special Representative Kubiš. We very much appreciate his professional and personal qualities, which have enabled him to earn the respect of all Iraqi political forces, and we wish him every success in his new important post.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We would like to express special thanks to Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his productive and effective work for more than three years in his capacity as Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) at a critical time for Iraq. Kazakhstan commends his skilful and persistent efforts to cope with multiple challenges and help guide Iraq on a positive track towards recovery and development. We support the UNAMI's endeavours to assist the Iraqi people, promote political dialogue, and establish Government institutions.

We congratulate Iraq on the election of its new President, His Excellency Mr. Barham Salih, the appointment of Prime-Minister-designate Adil Abdul-Mahdi and the partial formation of his new Cabinet. Kazakhstan extends its sincere congratulations to the Parliament, people and all political actors in Iraq on their efforts to overcome serious challenges and build Government institutions. We acknowledge that these are bold steps towards strengthening democracy, State-building and consolidating Iraqi society around the country's Constitution.

Kazakhstan expresses the hope that, as a matter of priority, the new Government of Iraq will take measures to restore social and economic structures and meet the urgent needs of the local population. Kazakhstan calls on the representatives of various political parties to support the newly appointed Prime Minister. Their support is essential to improve the social status of citizens, meet the needs of the people and strengthen the Iraqi economy. We hope that senior officials of Iraq will make an important contribution to the prevention of religious and inter-tribal tensions in the country.

Kazakhstan reaffirms its position on the adherence to territorial integrity, unity and respect for the sovereignty of Iraq. We certainly support continued and constructive dialogue between the federal Government of Iraq and the regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan. We commend the fact that the Government continues the process of electing senior officials despite the tense situation in the Middle East, the threats posed by Da'esh and the difficult internal socioeconomic situation. We feel confident the new Iraqi Government will strive to pursue an independent foreign policy and pay no attention to the interests of various political parties and outside forces.

We strongly condemn the recent deadly bombings that targeted the residential areas of Baghdad and Sadr City, and we wish speedy recovery to those injured. Undoubtedly, those crimes and acts aim to break the spirit of the Iraqis, in particular Baghdadis, who have started to enjoy the fruits of peace and who fear the derailment of their country's steady progress towards stability. The unity of people and decisive efforts of the security forces are certain to foil the designs of terrorists.

We commend UNAMI for its efforts to work with civil society, especially women's groups, for Iraq's recovery. Women, once empowered, can make a dynamic contribution to the peace process, with a leading role in decision-making and mobilizing the grass roots. We also appreciate the commitment of the Special Representative to engage the youth in training for democracy building and other developmental activities. Community awareness and constructive programmes are especially critical to prevent young people from relapsing into violent extremism.

We were saddened and horrified to learn of the more than 200 mass graves containing the remains of thousands of victims in areas of the country formerly controlled by Da'esh. We strongly condemn those horrific crimes committed in Iraq, which have caused immense and unimaginable trauma for the victims' families. That tragedy once again confirms that all

measures must be taken so that such evil is completely wiped out and not allowed to appear elsewhere. We endorse the view and resolve of Special Representative Kubiš that determining the circumstances surrounding the significant loss of life will be an important step in the mourning process for families and along their journey to secure their right to truth and justice.

We welcome UNAMI's communication with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iraq and the Embassy of Kuwait in Baghdad to schedule an official handover of the first package of the located Kuwaiti property. We praise the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iraq for its readiness to surrender Kuwaiti property to UNAMI to be safeguarded until the date of the transfer is set by the parties. We also consider it important that closing the file on missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, will contribute to normalizing relations between the two brotherly countries. We ask the tripartite mechanism to persevere and remain seized of the matter.

The world community should remain committed to supporting the Government and the people of Iraq in their various historic endeavours, and Kazakhstan will be a strong partner in the multilateral action and process. We again thank outgoing Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his dedication and contribution to the settlement of Iraqi issues and wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the important briefing by Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

Peru is following closely recent developments in Iraq. We note the conclusion of the electoral process. We believe that the recount of votes and the resolution of registered complaints reflect the proper functioning of the institutions and the rule of law that the country requires to peacefully resolve disputes. We expect the rapid establishment of a new Government capable of facing the country's important and urgent challenges and responding to the legitimate demands of citizens with a view to building sustainable peace in Iraq and the region in a new phase following the terrorism of Da'esh.

We emphasize the importance of the greater participation by Iraqi women in the political life of the country. We join the Secretary-General in calling for political leaders and the Council of Representatives to fulfil their commitment to elect women to high-level political positions.

Moreover, we note with concern the protests in Basra, among other places, where the population has mobilized to demand more effective action by the authorities to solve such basic problems as a lack of water, fragile infrastructure and basic services, and high youth unemployment. We regret that the violent nature of some protests and the subsequent repression produced fatalities. We recognize the right of citizens to protest peacefully and stress the need for law enforcement to always act with caution, proportionality and full respect for human rights.

We underline the importance of the State enjoying the support of all sectors of Iraqi society and the international community to deal with the remaining terrorists and ensure that those responsible for the atrocious crimes committed in Iraq are duly prosecuted. In that connection, we reaffirm the importance of the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Ms. Nadia Murad, increasing the visibility of the issue and encouraging adequate attention to be paid to the thousands of Iraqi women victims of Da'esh sexual violence.

We also consider it necessary to overcome the reported disagreements regarding the structure and deployment of the popular mobilization forces. As the Secretary-General has pointed out, Iraq must be able to pursue its national interests without becoming a theatre for the clash of regional interests.

We consider it important that the new Government, with the support of the international community, be able to promote greater investment in reconstruction and in the inclusive and sustainable development of the country, generating employment and opportunities to reverse the lack of confidence among the citizens and prevent new outbreaks of extremism and insurgency — especially considering that Da'esh has been defeated but not eliminated. In that regard, and by way of conclusion, we welcome the progress of the recovery and resilience Programme proposed by the Secretary-General and highlight the support offered within its scope by UNAMI, the United Nations country team, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our appreciation to Mr. Ján Kubiš for his outstanding work at the Head

of UNAMI as Special Representative of the Secretary-General during a difficult and crucial period for Iraq. It is work that we are sure will be continued with equal success by his successor, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to start by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ján Kubiš, for his briefing — his final one to the Security Council in his current capacity.

Please allow me to focus on three important aspects: the formation of the new Government, inclusive Government and accountability.

First, on the formation of the new Government, we congratulate and commend Iraq on the formation of the new Government within the constitutional time frame and look forward to the appointment of the remaining ministerial positions. Iraq has taken a very important step this year towards democracy and long-term stability. Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi presented an ambitious programme and took initial significant steps in favour of proximity to the Iraqi people, transparency and reform. We are encouraged by those early signals and expect that the Prime Minister and his Government will continue to be inclusive and representative of Iraq's diversity when implementing that programme.

We also welcome the elections that took place in the Kurdistan Region. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/975) spoke of a positive trend in the communication between Baghdad and Erbil, a dialogue that we hope to see continued and intensified. Equally important is the need for the new Government to increase efforts to meet the legitimate demands of its people and provide basic public services. That includes safe and sufficient drinking water, electricity, the creation of job opportunities and countering corruption. Iraq can count on the Netherlands to back such efforts — politically, financially and through our private sector — as we have done over the past years. We are in full support of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iraq, which will allow it to form and exercise the new Government.

My second point is that a diverse society wants to see itself reflected in its elected leaders and in a Government that is inclusive and representative and includes the meaningful participation of women. Iraq can be proud that it has historically been at the forefront of women's empowerment in the Arab world, with the first Arab female minister nominated in 1959. That example can still be replicated. The meaningful, political, social and economic participation of women is ever so important in view of the dark period in its history that Iraq and the Iraqi people experienced. That is why I want to take this opportunity to commend Nadia Murad for being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her voice, advocacy and all Yazidi and other Iraqis who suffered as a result of sexual violence and atrocities committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS).

Providing victims with means for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society is a priority area for Iraq's second national action plan on implementing resolution 1325 (2000). But in the aftermath of the defeat of ISIS the focus will also be on other areas of the national action plan, such as the social and economic empowerment of women, which Suzan Araf Maroof spoke about that in the Council in August (see S/PV.8324). In that respect, we encourage the Government to take steps to end impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence —for example, by considering a law on violence against women that criminalizes such violence, as other countries in the region have implemented. In today's Iraq the talents of all its people are indispensable, including those of women and young people, for its economy to grow and deliver a better future for all Iraqi citizens — men, women and children alike.

Finally, I want to mark the continuing engagement of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) on ISIS accountability and the commencement of the work by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL. Earlier this month, UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published an important report entitled *Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in Territory Formerly Controlled by ISIL*. Reportedly, an overwhelming majority of those graves contained victims of ISIS. So far 1,258 bodies have been exhumed, but it is estimated that there are human remains of between 6,000 and 12,000 people.

The task for UNAMI, the Investigative Team and the Iraqi Government is vast, that is, to secure, collect and preserve evidence and to give information to the families of the many missing. That is why the Netherlands has decided to contribute financially to the work of Investigative Team. We look forward to Special Adviser Khan's first briefing in December.

We encourage the new Government to continue to collaborate closely with both UNAMI and the Investigative Team on the collection, preservation and storing of evidence of those crimes that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

In our belief that there should be accountability in accordance with international standards, and looking towards the future, we call upon the new Iraqi Government — as we do on all others that have not done so yet — to ratify and implement the Rome Statute and, as such, recognize the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

In conclusion, I want to pay tribute to Special Representative Kubiš for the excellent work he was able to carry out with his team in implementing UNAMI's challenging tasks over the past three years and nine months. We look forward to working with the designated Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, who will start in December. We wish her a lot of success.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Ján Kubiš for his informative briefing. Let me also express our most sincere gratitude for his outstanding service and enormous contribution to peace and stability in Iraq. We look forward to closely working with Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert. Let me also reiterate our appreciation for the tremendous work that the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is doing in assisting the Iraqi authorities.

Let me begin by commending Iraq for the completion of the electoral process within the constitutional time frame and by welcoming the election of Mr. Barham Salih as President of the Republic of Iraq and of Mr. Mohammed al-Halbousi as the Speaker of the Council of Representatives. As pointed out by Mr. Kubiš, it was an exemplary, democratic and peaceful transfer of power. We also welcome the partial formation of a new Government by Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi and the adoption of the Government programme by the new Council of Representatives. We are confident that the appointment of the remaining members of the Cabinet will be completed soon. We urge the political parties to work constructively to that end and contribute to the swift formation of an effective Administration. We would also like to welcome the elections held in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the progress made in relations between Baghdad and Erbil. We call upon them to capitalize on that positive trend and resolve all outstanding issues through dialogue and consensus, based on the full application of the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution.

With the electoral process completed, we encourage the political parties in Iraq to work constructively towards the implementation of political, economic and social reforms, as well as the advancement of stabilization and reconstruction in the areas liberated from Da'esh. As the developments in the past months have shown, Iraqi citizens need an accountable and efficient Administration that would address the expectations of all groups of Iraqi society.

Therefore, we would like to draw the attention of the new Iraqi Government to the need to focus on the delivery of basic public services and tangible benefits for all Iraqis, including providing good governance, creating job opportunities, improving living conditions, fighting corruption and promoting economic development. Last but not least, we believe that consolidating security, law and order and providing for the return of internally displaced persons should also be among the most important areas of the new Government's focus.

We regret that none of the well-qualified female politicians were elected to senior leadership positions. We call upon the political leaders to ensure the appointment of women to senior positions within the new Administration and their representation at the highest levels of decision-making structures. There is no peace without justice, we have already said so in this Chamber on a number of occasions, and it also relates to Iraq.

That is why we believe that special emphasis must also be placed on the issue of serving justice to the victims of atrocities committed by terrorist groups, based on fair-trial requirements and in accordance with international standards. We express our full support to the Investigative Team tasked with assisting Iraq in holding accountable the perpetrators of violence. We strongly urge the Iraqi authorities to include sexual and gender-based crimes and other internationally recognized crimes in the prosecution of Da'esh fighters.

We hope that the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Nadia Murad will provide further impetus to ensure justice for women and members of religious minorities in Iraq, who are victims of outrageous and unthinkable violence by Da'esh. We also call upon the Iraqi authorities to ensure the provision of humanitarian

assistance, protection and the integration of women and children who are of Da'esh families that have no link with Da'esh.

In conclusion, let me express Poland's readiness to cooperate closely with the new Government of Iraq as well as our full support for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is grateful for the briefing delivered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Mr. Ján Kubiš. We wish to echo what has already been expressed by other members of the Security Council in thanking him for his work and efforts on dialogue and coordination that have been carried out on everyone's behalf. Much of what we recognize as a triumph for the Iraqi people is due in large part to the efforts by him and his team.

We commend the convening of the parliamentary elections held on 12 May, which were carried out in an orderly manner and in an environment free from violence. We wish to highlight the certification of those election results on 19 August by the Federal Supreme Court and the subsequent vote on 20 October of the Council of Representatives, which resulted in Mr. Barham Salih being elected as President of Iraq, who in turn appointed Mr. Adil Abdul-Mahdi as Prime Minister-designate. We emphasize the spirit of democracy and participation demonstrated by the Iraqi people throughout that process and we call on the elected representatives and all of the political actors involved to enter into dialogue and negotiations that will allow them to build a solid institutional framework and stable governance to the benefit of the Iraqi people.

The newly elected authorities have a long road ahead, including confronting the challenges that have arisen in the south of the country, where it is now urgent to implement actions in order to guarantee access to basic services for the population and prevent the emergence of violence, which would derail the reconstruction and reconciliation efforts that must prevail in this new phase. This is also an opportunity that should be used to strengthen the dialogue and good relations between Erbil and Baghdad.

Despite the progress made, we note with deep concern that the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/975) shows that attacks are still being perpetrated by Da'esh, and that that terrorist group remains capable of coordinating and carrying out attacks against the civilian population, civil and diplomatic infrastructure, as well as against the forces of law and order, such as those that have been reported in Baghdad, Ninawa and Kirkuk, among others.

We are horrified by the 202 mass graves that have been identified, which, according to the report by UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, contain the bodies of approximately 12,000 Da'esh victims — mainly women, children, people with disabilities and members of the Iraqi forces. That high number of victims, which could yet increase considerably, highlights the brutality and criminality of that terrorist organization and the urgent need to identify the perpetrators so that they can be held accountable for their actions.

In that regard, we encourage the Government of Iraq to make every effort to preserve the integrity of those mass graves, not only to identify the victims and return the bodies to the families, but also to collect and preserve as much evidence as possible to ensure that the violations of human dignity do not go unpunished. For that reason, it is important to promote capacity-building in Iraqi institutions in order to implement plans for the establishment of genetic databases that will allow for the exhumation, identification and preservation of the bodies of victims, which will strengthen the investigative work. The involvement of the Investigative Team established pursuant to resolution 2379 (2017) is essential to strengthening that work. It is also important to set up and implement, in the short and medium term, mechanisms for reparations to victims, which should include policies to promote memory, among others.

To achieve that goal, the cooperation of the various offices and agencies of the United Nations, as well as the wider international community, is essential to developing the technical capabilities of the Iraqi State. In that regard, we hope that the recommendations issued by UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in their report from 6 November will be reviewed and implemented.

We also wish to highlight the work of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in the identification of improvised explosive devices, anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war on Iraqi territory. We note in particular the removal of explosives that were submerged below the Fallujah iron bridge, as well as the launching of training workshops

on the safe elimination of explosive devices for police officers from the Ninawa, Al-Anbar and Kirkuk governorates, among others, in order to tackle the possible threats posed by the existence of those devices in the liberated areas. We also stress the essential role played by UNMAS in the clearing of improvised explosive devices that could be contaminating the mass graves found in the territories previously controlled by Da'esh.

We commend the efforts made by Iraq in identifying the areas where other mass graves might exist, as well as the work carried out on the recovery and return of assets of Kuwaiti heritage. We also take note of the data, maps and satellite images shared with the International Committee of the Red Cross to facilitate that process. However, we regret that there has been no progress made in the returning of Kuwaiti property that has been found so far, given that they have already gone through a process of cataloguing in Iraq. We stress the importance of the return of those assets for the reconciliation process and the strengthening of relations between Iraq and Kuwait. We note the willingness of UNAMI to facilitate that transfer and provide logistical assistance to those efforts.

To conclude, I wish to once again express, through the representative of Iraq, the recognition of my people and my Government to the people and the Government of Iraq for having overcome such difficult years, which has been and will continue to be an example for all of humankind. We appreciate the sacrifices that they have made on everyone's behalf.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to thank the team of Mr. Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for their comprehensive and detailed briefing, in which the main events of the past quarter were highlighted. My delegation is pleased to note that the Parliament of the Republic of Iraq has finally elected a President, a duty that has been granted to Mr. Barham Salih, whom we congratulate and to whom we wish every success throughout his time in office. We also welcome the appointment of the new Prime Minister.

We believe that the election of the new President represents not only a further step towards ending the political crisis that had left the country at a standstill since the elections on 12 May, but also sends out a clear message on the political will of the Iraqi people and leaders to collaborate in facilitating the process of democratization that is already under way in the country. We hope that all political parties will support and respect that decision. Like many other countries, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea wishes to urge the newly elected President to support the political will of the people by promoting policies of national unity that take into account the concerns of citizens from all social strata and all of the different peoples that make up the State of Iraq, while underscoring the urgent need to continue working to address the differences between the central Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

In that regard, it is important to highlight the important work carried out by UNAMI, which particularly supported the electoral process and supports the new Government's policy to guarantee the progress of the State reconstruction process, which requires promoting an increasingly inclusive political dialogue and reconciliation. On the parliamentary elections held in Kurdistan on 30 September, we commend the fact that they took place successfully and we call on the main political parties to respect the final outcomes of those elections, and that all of the complaints that arise be dealt with according to established legal procedures.

We wish to voice our concern about the violent incidents outlined in the report (S/2018/975), carried out in the form of street demonstrations in the south and other parts of Iraq, which, unfortunately, have even affected the security of certain resident diplomatic offices and Consulates. We hope that the local authorities will be able to deal with the situation and address with due attention the grievances and concerns of the demonstrators, those of which seemingly pertain to the basic needs of the citizens. However, we also take into account the actions taken by the Parliament and the Government, which include certain measures towards finding a satisfactory solution to that situation. We commend the tireless work of the Iraqi security forces for their ongoing clean-up of areas that have been cleared of explosives and other dangerous materials, as well as for their continued search for the remnants of Da'esh, which threaten the security of the population and hinder the ongoing process.

I would like to express our sincere appreciation and recognition for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, which is perceived positively and favourably in various areas of Iraqi society, such as

the public sector, electoral processes, human rights and the rule of law and operational and security issues. We would like to reiterate our recognition and gratitude to Special Representative Ján Kubiš for his commitment and tireless efforts in leading UNAMI over the past nearly four years. We wish him all the best in his future activities. Finally, we urge all the members of the Council and the international community to continue to support the Iraqi people and their President on their path to democracy and the reconsolidation of the State, whose stability is fundamental to that of the entire region.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): First, let me join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš, both for his briefings and all the work he has done over the past three years and nine months as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. We are grateful for his leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the significant contribution he has made to Iraq during this pivotal period in its history. We look forward to welcoming in December his successor, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and working with her to build on all the progress that he has made. Like the Netherlands, today I would like to touch upon three issues: Government formation, accountability and the question of missing Kuwaiti persons and property.

First, the United Kingdom joins other Council members in congratulating Iraq on the conclusion of the 2018 electoral process. We especially congratulate President Barham Salih, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi and Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, as well as the Kurdistan Democratic Party following the Kurdistan Region parliamentary elections. We welcome the formation of the Cabinet, which is well under way, and encourage the appointment of the remaining Cabinet members to be done in an inclusive manner and within the constitutional timelines. However, like the representatives of Poland, the Netherlands and others, we share the disappointment at the lack of female members among those appointed to the Cabinet to date, and we would encourage the Iraqi Government in its efforts to address that issue and promote the participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making in Iraq.

Once the Government has been fully formed, the United Kingdom looks forward to working with it to support it as it tackles the challenges that Iraq faces, those which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has outlined for us today. Those include promoting effective governance, security sector and economic reform, social protection for vulnerable groups — including internally displaced people — and improvements in the business environment. Recent events that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has highlighted, particularly in southern Iraq, demonstrate the importance of providing basic services, including water and electricity, for all Iraqis.

Women have a vital role to play in all of the areas that I have just mentioned, including national reconciliation efforts. We note the encouraging progress in that regard. In particular, we welcome the introduction of the inter-agency gender-based violence standard operating procedures in southern Iraq, which will provide essential support services for survivors of gender-based violence. The United Kingdom encourages the incoming Government to ensure the full implementation of Iraq's national action plan on women and peace and security.

Several speakers this morning have spoken about the importance of accountability in Iraq. The scale of the challenges facing the new Iraqi Government are clear. For example, the recent discovery of over 200 mass-grave sites demonstrates the importance of achieving justice for the victims of Da'esh crimes in Iraq. Those graves must be protected to ensure that the evidence can be properly collected and stored. The United Kingdom welcomes the continued strong support from both the Government of Iraq and UNAMI for the important work of the United Nations Investigative Team for the Accountability of Da'esh. I would also like to extend my own congratulations to Nadia Murad for her well-deserved Nobel Peace Prize. Efforts must continue to locate those still missing following their brutal kidnapping by Da'esh.

Thirdly, and finally, the United Kingdom would like to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2018/976) on resolution 2107 (2013) on the issue of missing Kuwaiti persons and property. The United Kingdom welcomes UNAMI's ongoing support on that important file. We hope that the new Government of Iraq will make progress on locating and identifying missing Kuwaiti persons and property. In that regard, the United Kingdom welcomes the visit by the Iraqi President to Kuwait on 12 November, and in particular the transfer that took place of one instalment of retrieved Kuwaiti property. It is very important that

this chapter of Iraq and Kuwait's history can be closed and that relations between those two neighbours can be further strengthened.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for his briefing on the latest developments in Iraq and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Since that was his last briefing, we take this opportunity to express our appreciation to him for all his dedicated efforts and leadership as the Head of UNAMI at a critical time in Iraq. We wish him all the very best in his future endeavours. We also welcome the appointment of Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head UNAMI.

We commend the people of Iraq on the completion of their 2018 national electoral process, which paved the way for the Government-formation process. We join others in congratulating the people and the Government of Iraq for their achievement. We highlight the holding of the first session of the Council of Representatives and welcome the election of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and of the President of the Republic of Iraq and the appointment of the Prime Minister. We welcome the peaceful transfer of power within the constitutional timeline. We hope the new Government will deliver on its programme in order to meet the hopes and expectations of the Iraqi people. We recognize the enormous challenge that Iraq continues to face. It is vital that the new leadership and the Government build on the important progress made in the past years to rebuild the country.

As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/975), we are also encouraged by the progress made with regard to the relations between Baghdad and Erbil, including the discussions between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government over outstanding issues. We also note the engagement between Baghdad and Erbil on the political process in Iraq, particularly in the new Iraqi Government-formation process. We hope the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government will further capitalize on the recently generated positive momentum.

Despite the remarkable progress made recently, we note that terrorism remains a serious challenge. We commend the Iraqi Government and its security forces for their continued efforts aimed at clearing the remnants of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant from the Iraqi territory, particularly from the north and north-central parts of the country. We believe there is a need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the security challenges and ensuring durable peace, promoting national unity, stability and reconciliation, addressing the humanitarian situation and rebuilding Iraqi economy and infrastructure.

In that regard, enhanced international and regional cooperation is critical. We support the call of the Secretary-General on the need to honour the pledges made at the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq. We commend the Iraqi Government for its continued efforts to reach out to neighbouring countries and other international partners to strengthen bilateral relations and advance mutual political and security interests.

In conclusion, we appreciate the role of UNAMI in supporting and accompanying the Iraqi people and the Government to ensure a smooth political transition at this critical juncture in the political history of the country. It is important that UNAMI continue to lend its support to the new Government of Iraq as it embarks on implementing its new programme to address the many complex and difficult challenges and put the country on the path of sustainable peace and reconstruction. We hope that the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General will build on the good work done over the past three years and nine months.

Mr. Vaverka (Sweden): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kubiš for his briefing. Let me join others in expressing our sincere gratitude for all the work he has done in support of Iraq during his time as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. We very much appreciate his tireless efforts, including his firm commitment on women and peace and security and, under his leadership, the advocacy efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to promote women in political and decision-making processes in Iraq.

Let me start by welcoming the confirmation of President Barham Salih and Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi. The partial formation of the Council of Ministers is encouraging. At the same time, we are disappointed by the lack of women among the ministers so far appointed. As inclusiveness and representation are key in the Government-formation process, I join

others in calling for the consideration of women candidates for the remaining Cabinet posts.

Iraq needs a stable national Government that brings Iraqis together and restores hope going forward. In the aftermath of the defeat of Da'esh, it is particularly important for the Iraqi people to feel that their voices matter and that they have an accountable Government. As has been underlined throughout this meeting this morning, the resurgence of Da'esh must be avoided.

As the new Government now gets to work and starts addressing the many challenges that lie ahead, intensified efforts are needed to advance political and economic reforms, address basic-service delivery, fight corruption and strengthen the rule of law. The economic prospects for all Iraqis, not least the youth, must also be improved. Success will require strong national leadership, but also international support, including by a united Security Council. A long-term perspective is needed for continued and coordinated international efforts in support of Iraq.

To ensure long-term peace and development, the root causes of conflict must be addressed. That includes the distribution of resources and influence among different groups in society. Reconciliation is critical to building a stable country and preventing future conflicts, and accountability is, in turn, crucial for reconciliation.

Sweden supports initiatives to strengthen accountability for violations of international law. We welcome resolution 2379 (2017), on the United Nations Investigative Team to hold Da'esh accountable. That is an important first step in holding those responsible for the atrocities carried out by Da'esh to account. We are pleased that Special Adviser Karim Khan has started his important mission and look forward to his first briefing to the Council.

Like others, I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Nadia Murad for being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to end sexual violence against women in conflict. We also welcome that Iraq has adopted a national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). We encourage UNAMI to assist the Government in the implementation of the plan, including protecting internally displaced people from sexual violence.

We welcome progress made in the dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil. With the new Government in place, the dialogue should be fully resumed, with both sides showing good faith and a constructive approach. We encourage the United Nations to use its good offices to facilitate dialogue among Iraqi stakeholders. UNAMI's role remains crucial, and its political mission must be fully utilized. We welcome the Mission's strengthened mandate, in particular with regard to the role of women and the situation of children. Rehabilitation and reintegration must be prioritized.

The inclusion — for the first time — of an operational women and peace and security component in the mandate will allow the Mission to further focus on those issues. Implementation is now key, and adequate financial resources are needed. How the Mission will mainstream gender as a cross-cutting issue must be followed up and reported upon. We appreciate the advocacy efforts that have already been made to promote the effective participation of women in political and decision-making processes.

Finally, Iraq must be able to pursue its own national interests and not become a proxy for confrontation by regional interests. We strongly emphasize the need for the continued respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Iraq, and we welcome Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi's approach in that regard. As Iraq moves forward on its path towards reconciliation, stability and sustained peace, it can continue to count on Sweden's support. Strong national leadership and the unity of the Council will be critical for sustainable peace in Iraq.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kubiš for his briefing. I highly commend his efforts in leading the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) during his tenure as Head of the Mission.

China congratulates His Excellency Mr. Barham Salih on his election as President of Iraq. China welcomes the progress made in forming the new Iraq Government and hopes that the new Government will continue to promote economic development, improve people's living conditions and accelerate Iraq's reconstruction process. As mentioned by other colleagues before me, peace, stability and reconstruction in Iraq are now at a critical stage. I would like to make the following points.

First, the general direction towards a political solution to the Iraqi issue should be adhered to. The parties in Iraq should, within framework of the Constitution, settle their differences through dialogue, promote national reconciliation and achieve lasting peace and security in the country. The international community should effectively respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq, support the United Nations in its good offices and provide constructive assistance for an inclusive political solution.

Secondly, there should be continued support for combating terrorism in Iraq. The relevant parties should strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation, unify standards and fight against all Council-listed terrorist organizations, as well as resolutely contain terrorist forces and curb the return of their activities and the momentum of their spread. The international community should support Iraq in its effort to bring perpetrators to justice in accordance with its domestic law.

Thirdly, efforts must be made to actively push for the economic recovery and accelerated reconstruction of Iraq. The Iraqi Government should speed up its national reconstruction process, give full play to its resource advantages, promote its economic development, enhance its capacity to provide public services and improve people's livelihoods. The international community should continue to provide support and assistance to Iraq, help ease its humanitarian situation, assist in its economic recovery and create a favourable environment for the national reconstruction of the country.

UNAMI has played an important role in supporting the Iraqi Government for an inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation and reconstruction, and it is continuing to push for enhanced bilateral relations between Iraq and countries of the region, such as Kuwait, as well as the settlement of the remaining bilateral issues. The international community should jointly support UNAMI in carrying out its work according with its mandate.

China supports any efforts conducive to the political settlement of the Iraqi issue and the fight against terrorism. As always, China will participate in the economic reconstruction of Iraq and continue to provide assistance to the best of its ability.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me, Mr. President, to congratulate you and the People's Republic of China on presiding over the Security Council this month and to express my thanks for the efforts you are making to organize the Council's work. I would also like to thank the State of Bolivia for its efforts during its presidency of the Council last month.

It is my pleasure to welcome the briefing of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Mr. Ján Kubiš. I commend his tireless and sincere work and that of his team. We are especially grateful for his efforts and excellent leadership of the work of UNAMI throughout the past years, which have been full of challenges. I also would like to congratulate his successor Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert. We look forward to expanding bilateral cooperation with her to serve the interests and needs of Iraq pursuant to the mandate of UNAMI. We underscore our country's full support for her.

My Government also wants to thank His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres for accepting our request to extend the mandate of Mr Kubiš until mid-January. We further thank the members of the Security Council for supporting our request, which will contribute to the continuation of the successes achieved by the formation of the Government.

Iraqis have successfully concluded their parliamentary elections. The political blocs and the Iraqi Council of Representatives were an exemplary model of democracy and peaceful transfer of power through the election of His Excellency Mr. Barham Salih as President of the Republic, as well as the formation of the Government with Mr. Adil Abdul-Mahdi as the Prime Minister, in addition to the selection of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives Mr. Mohammad Al-Halbousi within the time frame set out by the Constitution. Those three events this year reflected a desire to form an inclusive Government that represents Iraq's social and political unity — a Government that is able to meet the aspirations of the Iraqi people in the upcoming phase.

The newly elected Government has adopted a comprehensive ministerial plan based on security, economic and social pillars, which will serve all Iraqi

citizens. I would like to summarize this plan in the following points.

First, the Government will attach special attention to the provision of basic services in the Basra governorate, liberated areas and other Iraqi governorates. We will give more attention to resolving pending issues with the Kurdistan region, in particular with regard to issues of oil and financial management. We will work to enhance national identity and promote community participation and the protection of human rights in order to achieve social peace, stability and security.

Secondly, we will work to achieve development and economic goals. We will implement a policy of economic reform and carry out a transition from a revenue economy to a market economy through the implementation of development plans that target vital economic sectors that directly influence citizens' lives. We will provide support for the private sector so that it will contribute to economic growth. We will diversify our resources so that we do not rely heavily on oil revenues.

Thirdly, we will establish a system of good governance in Iraq through the implementation of the good governance compact adopted by the Cabinet in 2017, which stresses the importance of improving our financial and operational performance and the provision of services to citizens. In this regard, we hope that friendly States will invest in the process of national capacity-building.

Fourthly, we will continue to work hard and with resolve, in cooperation with all actors, to fight corruption in all its forms and manifestations, as it is one of the main obstacles to good governance in Iraq.

Fifthly, we will work to strategically allocate financial resources based on a programme that prioritizes the reform of public financial management, which is one of the Iraqi Government's main priorities.

Sixthly, we will follow up on the outcome of the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, hosted by the sisterly State of Kuwait. We urge friendly States to fulfil their pledges, as we have high hopes for that outcome. The reconstruction of Iraq is no less important than fighting terrorism. We call on the international community to support Iraq and its Government in the reconstruction of infrastructure in all Iraqi cities. That is an important and crucial element in achieving economic prosperity in the country.

Iraq is at the threshold of a new phase following our victory in the justified war against the terrorist gangs of Da'esh. This requires support and cooperation so that we can tackle the challenges of the post-Da'esh phase. Iraq has natural and human resources that will enable us to become a developed country. We should therefore focus on achieving political, economic, security and social stability as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development, promoting rights and freedoms and achieving social justice.

My Government is stepping up its efforts to eliminate all terrorist cells and to prevent their return in any form or under any name. Therefore, we will attach special importance to the ongoing capacity-building of our armed forces in all its categories, including the army, the police, the counter-terrorism apparatus, Peshmerga and the popular mobilization forces. We insist on prohibiting any military or armed formations outside State control.

We are coordinating with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. In that connection, this month my Government launched several counter-terrorism projects, including youth capacity-building, providing employment for youth, combating the financing of terrorism and violent extremism through strategic contacts, and prohibiting weapons of mass destruction. Those projects meet 4 of the 16 priorities that were identified by the Counter-Terrorism Committee and adopted by the Government of Iraq in 2015.

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Nadia Murad, an Iraqi citizen, is an acknowledgement by the world of the tragedy of Yazidis and all victims of terrorism and takfiri discourse in Iraq. The award honoured her courage and perseverance to defend the usurped rights, as well as the steadfastness of Iraqis in countering terrorism and extremism.

Iraq derives strength from its cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, as well its rich history. We need all strata of society to rebuild and achieve stability in the post-Da'esh period so that we can maintain the unity and stability of the country. Since 2003, successive Governments have worked to uphold and protect those principles, which we have done by adhering to our Constitution and applicable laws created to guarantee protection and decent living standards for all.

In this context, we find it odd that the Secretary-General includes strange references to racial discrimination in his report (S/2018/975). Racial discrimination does not exist in Iraq. These references, particularly in the light of the delicate circumstances in which my country finds itself, constitute a serious precedent that could undermine social peace. All Iraqis enjoy their civil and political rights, which are guaranteed by the Constitution and national legislation. There is no discrimination against any social group. Discriminatory discourse does not exist in Iraq.

The new Government will continue to apply the same approach to humanitarian solutions for the return of the families of Da'esh terrorist gangs. We are giving priority to their psychological and mental rehabilitation and their reintegration into their communities, once we are sure that they have been rehabilitated. In this regard, competent authorities in Iraq are considering a plan of action to prevent the recruitment of children that has been submitted by the United Nations country team.

We are fully aware that we must not overlook the important role of Iraqi women and their efforts to restore stability and achieving community reconciliation in the liberated areas. A conference was held in Baghdad to launch the Iraqi national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. The national action plan will enhance the role and responsibilities of Iraqi women in support of post-Da'esh peacebuilding. We are working to include women in the new Iraqi Government at all levels and to the greatest extent possible.

My country faces many difficulties and challenges, primary among which is the lack of medical and technical capacity to clear landmines and unexploded ordnance, which remain among the principal hindrances to the return of internally displaced families to the liberated areas. In this regard, we stress once again the urgent need to support the work of the United Nations Mine Action Service. We urge donor States to continue to support Iraq in mine-clearance.

My Government believes that certain countries, including Iraq, that have suffered from terrorism and serious crimes committed by criminal groups and terrorist gangs turn to capital punishment as one element of achieving justice for the victims and their families, in accordance with article 6.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is a sovereign right of those States to do so. Capital punishment in Iraq is related to terrorist crimes. We apply fair and thorough trial procedures, taking into consideration the right of the accused to defend themselves and appeal. In that regard, we note that Iraq's penal code does not include provisions that cover international crimes, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. We are working hard to finalize draft legislation on those particular crimes. This legislation would apply to the crimes committed by the Da'esh terrorists.

My Government is working to establish strategic partnerships with regional and international actors based on common interest in order to promote Iraq's status in the international community and resolve pending issues with neighbouring countries and others. We look forward to achieving peace, security and development. We enjoy a relationship of joint cooperation with the riparian States so that we can achieve a fair and equitable sharing of benefits based on the principles of international law. That would avert regional tension and instability. In this regard, Iraq expects UNAMI to play an active role, in accordance with its mandate.

In connection with enhancing bilateral relations with neighbouring States, Iraq looks forward to reaching an equitable joint formula for water-sharing quotas with those States, as a result of the great pressure exerted on the Tigris and Euphrates basin by climate change, competition and inequitable use of joint water resources. A large percentage of Iraqi land is under the threat of desertification due to climate change and water scarcity, which would clearly have a negative impact on the fertility of the land.

Iraq underscores once again that we will not accept the use of our territories by groups, whether they reside in those territories or are merely passing through, to launch attacks against neighbouring countries. In return, we hope that those States will act in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations while respecting our sovereignty. We hope that future reports of the Secretary-General will include elements on the impact of unilateral measures and violations by certain States that would lead to political and security instability in Iraq.

We would like to stress once again the good fraternal relations we enjoy with the State of Kuwait. My Government is working to improve this relationship at the political and economic levels. It is worth mentioning that the President of the Republic of Iraq, Mr. Barham

Salih, chose Kuwait as the site of his first official visit outside the country, on 11 November. This attests to the importance of Kuwait to Iraq. We are working to close the files pending between the two States, including the Kuwaiti National Archive, and submitted a package of television archives to Kuwait on 12 November.

My country is committed to making every effort to progress on the file of Kuwaiti prisoners and missing persons. We are striving to honour in full our commitments under resolution 2107 (2013), including by determining the facts surrounding the remaining Kuwaiti prisoners and missing persons and third-country nationals. Most recently, the Ministry of Defence called on all Iraqi citizens to provide information on the remains of Iraqi or Kuwaiti citizens who went missing in the 1991 war, in addition to Kuwaiti property. We have also run advertisements urging them to provide such information.

I note that the mechanism is pursuing excavation and exploration work under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We thank France, the United States and the United Kingdom for providing the mechanism with maps. We hope that the United Nations will allow the mechanism to use ground-penetrating radar and provide technical support, despite the obstacles pertaining to the mechanism's limited budget.

In conclusion, the new Government of Iraq is determined to implement the ministerial plan identifying the national and social priorities of Iraq and its citizens We hope that the international community will continue to support us as we seek to ensure the stability and prosperity of Iraq and its people.

Finally, we reiterate our thanks to Mr. Kubiš for his years of service and wise leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. We are grateful for the work of his team in Iraq and New York to assist Iraq within the mandate of the Mission. We look forward to working with Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and wish her and her team every success.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8397

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8397th meeting
Tuesday, 13 November 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Toure
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in today's meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Joséphine Mbela of the Congolese Association for Access to Justice.

Ms. Mbela will join today's meeting via video-teleconference from Kinshasa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): I thank the members of the Security Council for this opportunity to brief them on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the latest developments with regard to the electoral process under way and the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement.

The scheduled holding of presidential and legislative elections at the national and provincial levels is fast approaching, as we are now only nine days away from the beginning of the official campaign and less than six weeks away from the scheduled date of elections on 23 December. It should be noted that, despite continuing differences, in particular with regard to the use of voting machines and the reliability of the voter registry, all stakeholders remain firmly committed to the electoral process. The main opposition candidates for the presidential elections agreed on a single candidate on Sunday in Geneva. After a three-day conclave facilitated by the Kofi Annan Foundation, they appointed Martin Fayulu to represent them within a new coalition called Lamuka, which means "Wake up!" in Lingala. The coalition announced that a public meeting would be held in Kinshasa in the near future to introduce the joint opposition candidate, an agreed programme and the campaign staff.

The choice of Martin Fayulu, however, as the joint presidential opposition candidate has given rise to strong opposition among the militant elements of the Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social (UDPS) and the Union pour la nation congolaise (UNC). In response to their challenges, the leaders of the UDPS and the UNC announced their parties' withdrawal from the agreement signed the day before. Concerning the Front commun pour le Congo, it has just made public the team that will support the campaign of its candidate — Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary — whose programme should be unveiled on 15 November. At the same time, preparations for the holding of elections continue.

On 31 October, President Joseph Kabila Kabange chaired an inter-institutional meeting to assess the electoral process, in which the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), as a partner organization, was invited to participate. The Government reported that it had disbursed $322.2 million to the Independent National Electoral Commission on 23 October, with the latter announcing that it had been provided the means for ground and air transport and was ready to distribute election materials throughout the country in time for the 23 December elections. In addition, as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission, the training of approximately 600,000 election workers is under way so as to ensure the smooth operation of 75,563 polling stations at more than 23,000 different sites.

Although the accreditation process for witnesses, observers and journalists has begun, Congolese civil-society organizations have announced their intention to deploy thousands of observers on the ground so as to ensure the transparency and credibility of the process. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) also expressed its desire to deploy an electoral observation mission. That commitment at the regional level was reinforced by two high-level visits last week in Kinshasa: one by the SADC Electoral Advisory Council and one by the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security.

In order to contribute to the holding of peaceful elections, a platform made up of various religious

leaders — through the Commission for Integrity and Electoral Mediation — has just organized a forum for peace and reconciliation with the aim of bringing participants together to sign an act of commitment for the holding of peaceful, credible and transparent elections. Similarly, the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) will hold its fifty-seventh plenary assembly from 20 to 22 November in Kinshasa, also in order to evaluate the electoral process.

It is worth noting that, in a recent interview with international press, the Vice-President of CENCO and new Archbishop of Kinshasa, Monsignor Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, emphasized the need to reach consensus with regard to the voting machines so that that element does not constitute an obstacle to the holding of elections.

In spite of this dynamic that is setting the course for the elections on 23 December, the opposition is concerned about the narrowing of the political space, including the impossibility of holding meetings throughout the country and a lack of equitable access to public media. The opposition also condemns what it regards as the alleged use of State resources for the benefit of the candidate of the Front commun pour le Congo.

There is still much progress to be made to create an environment conducive to credible elections. It is precisely for that reason that I am sparing no effort in my good offices. I have initiated meetings with all the candidates for the presidential election and, in each of my encounters, I have insisted on the need to demonstrate tolerance and a patriotic spirit in order to reach consensus on their differences so as not to miss the opportunity to make the 23 December elections a veritable success.

I am also appealing to the Congolese authorities to ensure that the freedoms of expression and demonstration — which are the prerequisites for the establishment of a democratic debate — are respected. Elections that are accepted by the broadest possible majority of Congolese men and women will mark a major turning point in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by contributing to the strengthening of institutions, peacebuilding, democratic gains and the sustainable development of the country.

(*spoke in English*)

These long-awaited elections will take place in a volatile security environment in many parts of the country. Allow me to highlight several of our biggest concerns today.

First, I have grown increasingly alarmed over the situation in Beni in recent months, where we continue to face major challenges in implementing our mandate. As I mentioned to the Council during my previous briefing (see S/PV.8370), civilians, the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and MONUSCO alike are being targeted by the Allied Democratic Forces and Mayi-Mayi groups. Despite FARDC efforts and the Mission's robust patrolling and ongoing joint operations — the latest of which started yesterday — the attacks continue and are increasingly taking place near the centre of the town of Beni.

As members know, we are not only facing security challenges in Beni, but also supporting a major Ebola response effort. The recent visit by the Director-General of the World Health Organization and the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations helped to underscore the commendable results that can be achieved through coordinated efforts. Teams from the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization and other humanitarian partners are doing a remarkable job, with the support of MONUSCO.

However, we are still seeing a growing number of cases in the major population centres of Beni and Butembo, as well as significant community resistance to response efforts. Women are disproportionately affected, representing about 60 per cent of all probable and confirmed cases, due to a number of factors, including their roles as caregivers of the diseased. The Mission will continue its support to Ebola efforts as a matter of the utmost priority while also taking into account a gendered response lens. Our teams on the ground are providing extensive logistical and protection support to partners and are engaging with local authorities and communities to encourage their acceptance of response efforts.

Secondly, there is potential for armed group interference in elections in specific areas throughout eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — particularly in Tanganyika, South Kivu and the Grand and Petit Nord areas of North Kivu. Armed group violence in those key provinces could affect the

secure deployment of electoral material and may prevent certain parts of the population from voting on election day, thereby impacting the inclusivity of the process. It will be especially important for the Government to take steps in the coming weeks to secure polls, particularly to ensure the participation of women, who make up 50 per cent of registered voters.

Thirdly, we are also carefully watching the situation in the Kasais, following the forced return of Congolese migrants from Angola. Given the pace of returns, the limited capacity to receive returnees on the ground and the difficulties they face in returning home, there is a possibility for ethnic tension to flare up in certain areas of the Kasais. Despite the remoteness of the area, in which the Mission has a very limited footprint, MONUSCO has been providing support to humanitarian partners and engaging with Congolese and regional actors to advocate for a more measured pace of return.

It is in that dynamic context that we move towards the long-awaited elections in just over one month's time. Our collective focus must now be on ensuring the credibility of the process. It is of paramount importance that candidates have equal access to political space during the campaign period and that restrictions on peaceful demonstrations are lifted consistently throughout the country.

Further progress in the implementation of confidence-building measures and the existence of a level political playing field throughout the campaign period leading up to 23 December will significantly enhance the credibility of polls and contribute to post-electoral stability. I will continue to advocate with all parties in that regard. I count on the members of the Council to support our efforts and to convey the same messages in the coming weeks.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Mbela.

Ms. Mbela (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank the Ambassador of China for inviting me to address the Security Council on behalf of my organization, the Congolese Association for Access to Justice.

I am Joséphine Mbela and I am a human rights lawyer in charge of advocacy and administration within the Association. It is a non-governmental and apolitical organization that works to promote and protect human rights, the primacy of the law and the consolidation of the rule of law. It provides legal and judicial assistance to victims of rights violations, particularly before the United Nations human rights protection mechanisms. I will focus on three points during my briefing: first, the political and electoral situation; secondly, the human rights situation; and, thirdly, the low participation of women in the electoral process.

First, with regard to the political and electoral situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the political climate remains tense 41 days on the eve of the elections scheduled by the Independent National Electoral Commission, due to the failure to fully implement the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016, mainly with respect to political de-escalation measures.

To date, the Association has remained alarmed by the detention of 51 political prisoners, including the young Eugène Diomi Ndongala, Jean-Claude Muyambo and Gérard "Gecoco" Mulumba Kongolo. And we note that of the 51 political prisoners, 46 have benefited from the amnesty accorded in 2014, although they have not yet been released. To that we must add the 28 citizen movement activists, including Carbone Beni and Gloria Senga.

It is also worth noting that four opposition media outlets are still closed in Lubumbashi, namely, Radio Télévision Lubumbashi Jua, Nyota Radio Télévision, Télévision Mapendo and La Voix du Katanga. Several leaders were forced into exile, including Moïse Katumbi, Musanya Mouissy and Oscar Rashidi Akidi. The electoral process has been marred by strong political tensions resulting from the Independent National Electoral Commission imposing the use of voting machines, even though article 237 ter of the electoral law bars electronic voting and there are approximately 10 million voters without fingerprints on the electoral register.

Secondly, the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo also remains a cause for much concern, insofar as it has been punctuated by insecurity and a growing number of incidents of sexual violence in the Kasais, the resurgence of massacres of civilians in Beni, diminishing civil liberties, arbitrary arrests and detentions accompanied by acts of torture and mistreatment by security services and law enforcement, and the use of justice for political purposes. Finally,

the senior-most officials responsible for human rights violations, including the security agents responsible for the arbitrary arrests and detentions, enjoy impunity.

More concretely, three days ago three activists from the youth movement Lutte pour le Changement were arrested in Goma by the security services because they were peacefully demonstrating at the university. There are also seven members of the citizen movement Les Congolais Debout that have been held incommunicado for two months in the prison of the national intelligence agency for raising awareness among citizens about the use of voting machines. Twenty-two members of the various citizen movements have been arrested for holding demonstrations to demand that the girls that have become victims of sexual violence in the Kasais receive treatment. Finally, 17 other members of the movement Vigilance Citoyenne were arrested for demonstrating and encouraging the people towards civic engagement and the fight against corruption. Those are some cases of human rights violations for which we call upon the Government to ensure their release.

Thirdly, I now turn to women's participation in the electoral process. Women are the least represented in political and administrative functions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Law No. 15/013 of 1 August 2015, on the implementation of women's rights and gender equality, has not been upheld, particularly when drafting the lists of candidates for the political parties for the various elections that were held, as the electoral law does not make that obligatory. To be more precise, while women make up 51 per cent of voters registered in the electoral roll, they represent only 12 per cent of the candidates, which is less than the 30 per cent recommended by the gender parity law.

However, working as a human rights defender is especially perilous, specifically for a woman like me, who has chosen to defend equal rights for all, including the right to live in dignity, especially in a country plagued by strong tensions such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as given my work as a former member of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I am committed to that challenge despite the risks posed by continuing my fight for the well-being of the people of all political leanings.

All that notwithstanding, our Association calls upon the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to implement political de-escalation measures by releasing all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience to ensure the opening of a space for the exercise of public freedoms for all political and social movements; ensure effective protection of persons and their property; fight against the impunity of the senior officials of the security services; guarantee equal opportunities for all candidates; and promote women's leadership in public affairs management by implementing the gender parity law. We call upon the Independent National Electoral Commission to quickly reach consensus with all stakeholders in the electoral process on the conditions for the use of voting machines and the fate of voters without fingerprint records.

We call upon MONUSCO to step up its patrols in the areas affected by the massacres, particularly Beni and Lubero, in order to prevent recurrent attacks by elements of the Allied Democratic Forces. We also call upon MONUSCO to continue to renew its readiness to provide logistical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission. We call upon the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office to continue its monitoring throughout the process.

Lastly, our Association calls upon the Security Council to remain galvanized on the issue of the protection of civilian populations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in general, and Beni in particular; the implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement by the Congolese Government; and the fight against impunity for a successful conclusion of the electoral process by 23 December.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Mbela for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her very informative briefing. On behalf of France, allow me to reiterate our full support for her commitment at all levels, as well as that of MONUSCO. I also thank Ms. Joséphine Mbela for her insightful testimony on the expectations of the Congolese people with regard to the elections, especially the key role that women must be able to play. She can rest assured that her important messages have been and will continue to be heard.

As I had the opportunity to say during the Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, we are at a crucial moment in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are all convinced that there is now a historic opportunity, with the elections on 23 December, for the first democratic and peaceful transfer of power in the country. Successful elections — which is to say free, credible, open and transparent ones, in the context of a peaceful environment and the results of which are recognized by all — would undoubtedly give way to a new chapter in the country's history. It would pave the way for stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and would contribute significantly to creating the conditions for its development.

Progress has been made to that end. Electoral materials are beginning to be distributed throughout the country, provisional voter rolls have been published for everyone to review and the Government has once again begun to contribute to the Independent National Electoral Commission to enable it to operate fully. France welcomes the progress.

However, that technical progress will be meaningful only if all candidates can compete freely in the elections and if the Congolese people have confidence that their vote will be fully recorded. Trust is therefore the key to success. Efforts have been made to reconcile views on the use of machines for printing ballots and on the electoral register, and technical questions have been raised. It is essential that dialogue among all parties continue to be pursued to respond to them and so that agreement is reached quickly on the conditions for preparing for the elections. All Congolese political actors involved in the elections, whether in organizing or competing in them, must rise to the challenge and heed the people's call for overcoming their differences and finding the broadest possible consensus.

As the Council has frequently call for, fully and in good faith implementing the so-called relaxation measures called for in the Saint-Sylvestre agreement remains necessary. Through its Commissioner for Peace and Security, the African Union has called on all parties

> "to ensure calm and arrive at agreement to find viable solutions to candidate and ballot security, reach consensual solutions to issues related to the electoral register and to making the political space more inclusive, and ensure equitable access to public media for all actors".

The Saint-Sylvestre agreement provides for the lifting of the general ban on demonstrations. Although some political meetings have been held in Kinshasa without incident, which France welcomes, the lifting is still awaited. Out in the provinces, we continue to see frequent instances of political rallies being prohibited, often on very short notice, with demonstrators being manhandled and arrested. It is essential that the lifting of the ban on demonstrations be implemented throughout the entirety of the territory.

The official campaign begins in 10 days' time. During the Security Council's visit to the Democratic Republican Congo, the Government undertook to ensure that all political activities would be free and unhindered during the time of the visit. For their part, the opposition leaders whom we met committed themselves to carrying out those activities in a peaceful manner. We call on all parties, both Government and opposition candidates, to honour their commitments for the good of the Congolese people.

Finally, we respect the choice of the Congolese authorities to organize elections without external assistance. We will remain ready to support the holding of the elections, in particular through MONUSCO, should the Congolese Government so request. Similarly, the African Union has also reiterated its readiness to pool its resources and coordinate its efforts with those of MONUSCO in order to provide additional support for organizing elections. I would also like to briefly address three points that, although not related to the elections, remain especially important.

First, regarding the situation in the east of the country, armed group activities, in particular by the Allied Democratic Forces, continue to jeopardize civilians, particularly around the town of Beni. We are aware of the situation in that particular part of the country. France encourages MONUSCO, specifically its Intervention Brigade, to ambitiously neutralize those groups and restore to the civilian populations of Beni the peace to which they aspire.

Secondly, the Ebola epidemic is raging in that same region of the country, while the security situation has significantly complicated the response. France commends the courageous commitment of Congolese health services and international partners, including MONUSCO, in combating the epidemic. We encourage the Democratic Republic of the Congo's partners to respond to the call and fund the regional response

plan. Otherwise, the risk of regional spillover is high. Along those lines, I would refer to the Council's call in resolution 2439 (2018) for ensuring access and safety for humanitarian and medical personnel.

Finally, turning to the humanitarian situation in the Kasais, the return of thousands of Congolese people from Angola has significantly complicated the response to the crisis, in an area already ravaged by recent tensions. France commends the solidarity shown by the people of the region who provided assistance to the returnees, even though most of them are themselves living in difficult conditions. Also on this point, the country's partners must rise to the challenge and provide the necessary assistance to help the people concerned. On all of those points, you, Mr. President, may be assured of France's steadfast commitment.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): Let me thank Special Representative Zerrougui and Ms. Mbela for their briefings and their insights.

I want to direct my comments today to my colleagues, but above all to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as they approach elections with great consequences for their future. At an Arria Formula meeting on the Democratic Republic of the Congo last February, the Congolese Foreign Minister made a comment that "you have to visit the Congo to really understand the situation there". I have visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo, met with its leaders and listened to its people. I spoke with mothers, fathers and children, in and out of camps. Their message was heartfelt and unmistakable: they want a better life. And they want a voice in their own futures. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo want what every human being wants — to be safe and free to raise their children and live their best lives.

There are voices today telling the Congolese that democracy is not the way to achieve their hopes for themselves and for their families. They want them to believe that representative Government is too risky and too inefficient. They are asking them to continue to put their trust in Government that is not accountable to them. Those voices are wrong.

Democracy can be messy, and it can be unpredictable. But democracy is a process, and it is not dependent on a single event or decision. It is the result of years, decades — sometimes centuries — of actions and decisions. Democracy is the hard work of allowing the people to fairly and safely express their will, and giving them the confidence that their decisions will be honoured.

My country, the United States, has over 200 years of experience with democracy. It took us much of that time to fully include all Americans in the vote. And our democracy is still far from perfect. Democracy takes time and effort, but history shows us that it is worth it. Democracies are more prosperous, more peaceful, less corrupt and more innovative. Most importantly, democracy honours the desire in every one of us to build lives of dignity and self-determination, not just for ourselves — not even mostly for ourselves — but for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren yet to come.

That is why so many people have fought so hard and sacrificed so much over the years for the right to hold their Governments accountable.

The democratic process is under way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It began with the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016, built on the foundation of the Congolese Constitution. It gathered strength with the electoral calendar that set out a clear process for elections on 23 December 2018. It gained momentum with President Kabila Kabange's agreement that he would not run in the upcoming elections. Democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is now poised for its greatest test. It is a historic opportunity.

For any country struggling to govern itself, the peaceful transfer of power is a decisive moment. It is the moment when all of the theory of representative Government fades into the background and the decisions of real people in real situations come to the forefront. Peacefully surrendering power tests the ability and willingness of individual men and women to put aside their personal interests and agendas and put the people first. The hopes and aspirations of more than 80 million Congolese people now depend on the leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo passing that test.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been very clear that it is holding elections on 23 December and that it is doing so without the help of the international community. We respect their sovereign right to make that decision. It is a decision with tremendous consequences for the Congolese people. We have spent the past two years reiterating in the Security Council the necessity for free, fair and credible elections on 23 December. All of the

parties know what they need to do. President Kabila understands his role. The Democratic Republic of the Congo Government understands what must be done. The National Independent Electoral Commission knows the preparations that it must undertake in the coming six weeks. There is no excuse for failure, no reason for delay. All that is remaining is for the leadership of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to show the will to follow the democratic path that has been laid out before it. The whole world is watching to see what the legacy of President Kabila will be.

To the Congolese people, as they prepare to take this momentous leap into their future, my message is this: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is the birth right of each citizen and every human being. They must claim it; demand it; seize it for themselves and their grandchildren yet to come. I want them to know that there are people throughout the world hoping for their success. And I want them to know that the prayers and best wishes of the American people are with them.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to express our gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her excellent briefing on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with only six weeks remaining before the holding of elections. We also wish to recognize and express gratitude to Ms. Joséphine Mbela of the Congolese Association for Access to Justice for her briefing.

Having read and analysed resolution 2439 (2018), concerning the recent outbreak of the Ebola virus, we commend the efforts made by all humanitarian and health personnel on the ground, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, as well as all other front-line agents involved in response activities. In that regard, we commend the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for supporting the efforts made by the Government, WHO and other actors to respond to the Ebola outbreak amid a complex environment.

In that regard, we also wish to commend the capacity of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its leadership in responding to the Ebola outbreak, and in particular for providing free health care in the affected areas, as well as for the daily updates on the status of the outbreak. We urge the members of the Council and the international community in general to increase their financial and humanitarian assistance through reliable organizations in order to respond to the urgent needs of the population.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea reiterates that it attaches the utmost importance to the events unfolding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, given the strong bonds of brotherhood and friendship that unite us and given that we are both States members of the same subregional institutions. We once again reiterate that stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is crucial to the stability of the wider subregion, of which the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is part. We value the efforts deployed by the country to achieve stability in the build-up to the triad of elections to be held in the country on 23 December, namely, presidential, legislative and provincial elections. That is a key aspect for the future and definitive stabilization of the country.

In that regard, it is worth noting that considerable progress has been made to date. Preparations are advancing in line with the electoral calendar, including the publication of the voting roll in accordance with legislation, the easing of political tensions and dialogue among all parties, particularly on the use of voting machines. We are also pleased to note that, as indicated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Government has made a significant amount of money available to the Independent National Electoral Commission to guarantee the successful holding of the upcoming elections.

It is for those reasons that we continue to encourage the Government, the Electoral Commission, the political parties, civil society and all national stakeholders concerned to continue strengthening the electoral process so that all citizens are able to exercise their right to vote in the best conditions, as well as to raise awareness among the population on how to exercise that right to vote. It is important that they continue working to peacefully carry out political activities and do everything possible to ensure that the 23 December elections are credible, transparent and inclusive and that they take place in an atmosphere of peace, harmony and security, with the full and safe participation of women. Compliance with the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016 is the best guarantee for the satisfactory holding of the elections and the subsequent peaceful transfer of power, which are key aspects for the legitimacy of the authorities

that are elected and, above all, for the stability of the country and the region.

The easing of political tensions, implementing the recommendations of the International Organization of la Francophonie, which we previously referred to, and ensuring dialogue among all parties on the use of voting machines are also important aspects. In that regard, we welcome the meeting of the various political stakeholders in the country that took place on 29 September.

One of the lessons learned from the Security Council's most recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo was that for the definitive and resounding success of the upcoming elections and in order for them to be a turning point for the Congolese people, all possible post-election scenarios must be clearly analysed and appropriate measures must be implemented in order to guarantee the building and consolidation of lasting peace in the country.

We reiterate our satisfaction at the public statement made by President Joseph Kabila Kabange on 19 July before a joint session of the National Assembly and the Senate, in which the President reiterated his intention to respect his country's Constitution and underscored that his Government remained firm in its intention to fully shoulder the responsibility to finance the presidential, legislative and provincial elections, as well as his intention not to run as a candidate in the upcoming elections. Those gestures represent a legitimate exercise of sovereignty and independence, illustrating President Kabila's determination and commitment to his country. The international community should continue to support the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the electoral process, while respecting the principle of non-interference, as well as the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

The security situation in the east of the country, especially in Beni, must be closely monitored in the days leading up to the elections, due to the challenges that it poses. In that regard, we encourage the Government to continue to implement measures to address the security situation and the activities of armed groups in various provinces, as well as to protect civilians, with the support of MONUSCO. We also urge all of the parties concerned to act responsibly so as to promote social cohesion, especially during the electoral and post-electoral period, and we call for the cessation of hostilities on the part of the armed groups. We also encourage the Congolese authorities to continue to fight impunity to ensure that those responsible for crimes and gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law are brought to justice.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea strongly condemns the pillaging and exploitation in conflict zones and the transfer of raw materials to other regions, actions that serve to underscore the double standards observed during conflicts and, at times, explain the reasons for them. Without a definitive solution to that problem, the possibility of achieving a genuinely successful outcome to it will decrease considerably. The illegal exportation of the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo generates astronomical economic benefits that do not go to benefit the Congolese people, but other actors instead. It is therefore important to take steps to put an end to that situation and, if necessary, impose sanctions on those who do not comply with international standards in that regard.

Equatorial Guinea strongly believes that the assistance provided by various international organizations, including the United Nations, in close collaboration with the European Union, the African Union, countries of the region, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States, is essential to facilitate political dialogue in the Democratic Republic of Congo and throughout the region and in the quest for a lasting solution to the political situation in that country. To that same end, Equatorial Guinea would like to echo the call made by the African Union Peace and Security Council to establish a coordination mechanism that includes all of the actors I mentioned, with a view to ensuring effective and consistent support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Equatorial Guinea also calls for the guaranteed implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed on 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa. We urge its signatories and guarantors to take the necessary steps and redouble efforts to ensure its full and effective implementation. It is therefore crucial to neutralize the armed groups operating in the east of the country.

Let me conclude by inviting all parties involved in the process to continue along the path of internal inclusive dialogue and avoid any violent acts that could lead to a

disruption of the process. We also take this opportunity to spiritedly call on the international community to fully support the Government, MONUSCO, the Electoral Commission and other parties directly concerned in the process to foster confidence-building measures so as to ensure an environment that is conducive to the holding of peaceful elections and the commitment to a road map towards the peaceful transfer of power in an environment of peace and national harmony.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the important briefings by Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and Ms. Joséphine Mbela. We would like to highlight the efforts being made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Independent National Electoral Commission to comply with the electoral calendar and hold on 23 December transparent, free, credible and inclusive elections.

In that regard, we must reiterate the importance of ensuring that citizens exercise their electoral rights by giving all candidates and their parties full and equal opportunities to promote and advertise their proposals and platforms. That means, among other things, guaranteeing the full exercise of the freedoms of association, expression and the press. We also underline the crucial importance for all political actors to remain committed to the 31 December 2016 political agreement and the subsequent implementation of confidence-building measures.

We urge the political actors to maintain close coordination with the Government and the Electoral Commission, with a view to resolving any concerns on logistical issues such as the use of voting machines and voter registration, so as to prevent any possible challenge to the results and ensure a normal electoral process. In that regard, we also consider it necessary to have in place contingency plans for possible incidents. We deem essential the constructive involvement of all actors in supporting security measures that may be necessary to ensure a normal electoral process. We note with particular concern the situation of insecurity in the east of the country. In addition, we highlight that the outbreak of the Ebola virus makes addressing the serious challenges the country is facing even more complicated. We must condemn the latest attacks in Beni and Ituri perpetrated by armed groups against civilians and health personnel, as well as the kidnapping of minors, and express our solidarity with the victims.

In that connection, we would like to highlight the work carried out in such difficult conditions by Government health personnel, with the vital support of the World Health Organization and the United Nations, as well as the protection provided by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We underscore the importance of the international community redoubling its efforts to address the grave humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finally, we wish to stress the importance for the international community, including the relevant regional and subregional organizations, to continue to closely monitor the electoral process and the post-election period, with a view to supporting and accompanying the process of building sustainable peace in the country.

Mr. Toure (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her detailed briefing on developments in that country. We also thank Ms. Joséphine Mbela for her enlightening briefing.

As the holding of the presidential, legislative and provincial elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo is five weeks away, my delegation commends the Independent National Electoral Commission for its successful preparation of the electoral process, which will enter its crucial phase at the 22 November launch of the electoral campaign. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire calls on all Congolese political actors involved in the electoral process to carry out a peaceful campaign and create an environment conducive to the holding on 23 December of free, transparent and credible elections. We also encourage the Commission to strengthen its efforts to raise awareness among voters on how to use voting machines and to inform them that they are secure.

On the eve of the launching of the electoral campaign, the health situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, marked by the continuing Ebola epidemic, remains a matter of concern for my delegation. Indeed, the electoral campaign, which will bring about large gatherings and movements of the population, gives rise to fears of high risks of the spread of the disease. My delegation therefore calls on national and international health authorities to be vigilant in strengthening preventive measures during

the electoral period. To that end, we welcome the joint evaluation mission on the situation on the ground carried out on 5 November in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by Mr. Jean Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and Mr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, a few days after the adoption of resolution 2439 (2018), on the Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We also commend the work of the United Nations staff, MONUSCO, the Ministry of Health of the Democratic Republic of Congo and all the bilateral and multilateral partners who are in a challenging environment leading the fight against that epidemic.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire appreciates the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, all the staff of MONUSCO and the United Nations agencies, regional and international organizations and all the partners that provide support to the Democratic Republic of Congo. We encourage all of them to maintain and increase their level of assistance to that country with a view to restoring peace and stability.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her continuous, tireless efforts, as well as those of her team. We believe that the United Nations, including her good offices, play a significant role, and we deeply appreciate her updates to the Security Council. We are also very grateful to Ms. Mbela for her valuable perspectives from the ground. We understand that the situation and the circumstances under which she operates are not always easy.

We are now less than two months away from decisive elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I was encouraged by the Special Representative's message today that the main players are committed to making sure that the electoral process is successful, because transparent, credible and inclusive elections would contribute to peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the entire region. Should they fall short, all of that would no longer be certain. The Council must therefore remain actively engaged. I would like to focus on three important aspects in the preparations for the elections: confidence-building, ensuring democratic space, and international support.

Confidence in the electoral process will be key for the elections to be credible and to produce an outcome that would be acceptable to all. Important progress has been made in recent weeks, especially on the technical aspects of preparations. However, significant challenges remain to bridge the confidence gaps. In that regard, we welcome the steps taken by the Independent National Electoral Commission and Special Representative Zerrougui to build trust in the electoral process. We call on all parties to re-engage in consultations to resolve outstanding issues. The Government, of course, holds a particular responsibility in that regard.

Disagreement on voting rolls and voting machines, including the uncertainty around timely delivery of the equipment, continues to be of concern. There is still need for greater outreach and public information about the electoral process, including the voting machines, from the Electoral Commission, the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and other civil society stakeholders. That is especially important in regions outside of Kinshasa. There now needs to be a clear, common understanding among the main political actors as regards the outstanding technical aspects, including on the voting machines, in order to de-escalate tensions and quell over-politicization of the issue.

The restrictions on democratic space continue to hamper the prospects for credible elections, as set out today by Ms. Mbela. The New Year's agreement and the confidence-building measures foreseen therein must be fully implemented by all parties. It is important that all candidates have the same possibilities to campaign, including through access to media. National civil-society-led observations of the elections will play a crucial role and must be allowed to carry out their work without interference. Safeguarding the democratic space through ensuring the full and equal participation of women is also critical. That includes clear information about voting rights and registration processes.

The high levels of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, and other human rights violations and abuses must be addressed. As we heard today, the security situation also has a direct impact on the Ebola response. We welcome the recent visit of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Lacroix, and the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Mr. Tedros, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council remains unified in its support to halt this health crisis, as reflected in resolution 2439 (2018), which we adopted two weeks

ago. We appreciate the Government's efforts, as well as those of the United Nations and health workers on the ground, and we continue to emphasize the need to prevent the disease from spreading, including to neighbouring countries. We have heard the concerns in that regard today by the Special Representative, including on the security situation in Beni.

We welcome the regional initiatives by the Southern African Development (SADC) and the African Union (AU) to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo with election observation missions. The Government should be encouraged to also engage with other regional and international actors in that regard. It is crucial that the United Nations and MONUSCO continue to assist the Government and the Electoral Commission before, during and after the elections. Technical support as well as the Special Representative's good offices are essential. MONUSCO should also continue to be prepared to support the logistical preparations for the elections.

International and United Nations staff, including election observers, peacekeepers and experts working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, must be able to safely carry out their tasks. The Government bears the primary responsibility to protect international staff within its territory and to hold perpetrators accountable. We would like to recall that attacks on peacekeepers and United Nations personnel and experts are sanctionable offenses under the Democratic Republic of the Congo sanctions regime.

The international community's united support for credible elections is clearly demonstrated in the joint communiqué issued by the African Union Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Security Council in July, as well as the joint communiqué of the AU, SADC, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and United Nations on the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Maintaining that unity for the entire electoral cycle, including the post-election period, will be significant.

In conclusion, bridging the confidence gaps, ensuring democratic space, addressing violence and maintaining unified international support will be critical to ensure credible, transparent and inclusive elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The elections on 23 December are not a panacea for all troubles, but they would be a crucial step in the work towards achieving peace and stability in the country and beyond.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and Ms. Joséphine Mbela for their statements and information provided.

During the recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was led jointly by France and Equatorial Guinea, we had an opportunity to converse with the Independent National Electoral Commission, as well as with Government authorities, including President Kabila Kabange. That allowed both the host country and the members of the Security Council to make clear their positions and expectations regarding the forthcoming elections. We believe, in that context, that the most propitious thing to do at this stage is to express full support for the progress and commitment shown by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet the deadlines established in the electoral calendar, without prejudice to the implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016, in particular to the confidence-building measures enshrined therein, which are conducive to the effective realization of elections and a peaceful transfer of Government. In order to arrive at consensus on key issues surrounding the electoral process, and in accordance with the call made by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo last October, we call again for its complete and effective implementation.

Another conclusion that the visit allowed us to reach is the fact that there is a need for the Government and the opposition to work together in order to be able to advance confidence-building measures. With that understanding, although it is necessary for the Government to take the initiative and assume leadership with regard to its implementation, those measures will not be feasible without the participation of the opposition. We therefore condemn the call to protests, which is inflammatory and leads to violence. We urge the populace to respect the law. We reiterate our call to all parties to work together and collaborate with a view to the holding of transparent, credible, peaceful and inclusive elections, with the full and effective participation of women and young people at all stages of the electoral process. We take note of the meeting held by the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of the

Interior, Mr. Henri Mova, regarding the participation of women in the electoral process and his commitment to improving the security of the candidates. Only the active participation of women as constituents and elected officials will ensure an inclusive election process.

On the other hand, we value the work of the Independent National Electoral Commission, in particular its willingness to address the concerns of the presidential candidates regarding the electoral process, as evidenced by their meeting on 4 October. Likewise, we commend its commitment to providing support to political parties for the training of electoral observers in the use of voting machines, as well as its pursuit of consensus through a technical committee. Likewise, we support the sovereign decision to finance the elections in accordance with the logistical and technical needs of the Electoral Commission; however, we invite the Commission to call on MONUSCO should it deem such action appropriate.

We commend the initiatives and good offices of the Special Representative and her meetings with various actors in order to exchange views and establish a coherent and coordinated approach between the United Nations and regional actors. Likewise, we welcome the meetings held with various authorities, political platforms and civil society groups to discuss the electoral process. We support the work of MONUSCO, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of Africa in preparing for the elections and encourage them to maintain their cooperation with the Independent National Electoral Commission. We also encourage them to redouble their efforts to improve the security situation, respect for human rights and to combat Ebola.

The challenges facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the margins of the elections have exponentially increased and their solution lies in addressing the root causes of the conflict, one of which is the lack of control over natural resources, which is a factor that contributes to prolonging the crisis as a result of the fragmentation of armed groups and the systematic exploitation of the country's resources by transnational corporations that operate without oversight.

For that reason, we believe that it is not enough to monitor and sanction armed groups — both their leaders and individual members — and the parties to the conflict. We must apply sanctions to the networks that make up the entire chain of those involved in the conflict, including commercial and financial facilitators. In that regard, the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council must work together to investigate and identify these corporations, thereby countering or definitively eliminating these criminal networks.

In short, the control of areas rich in natural resources and their sovereign administration is paramount, both for the cessation of hostilities and for economic development. When a country maintains effective control of its resources and there is a political will to administer them for the benefit of the population, it is possible to achieve a structural change that leads to the stabilization and strengthening of the rule of law, while fully respecting the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her briefing. We also appreciate the statement by Ms. Joséphine Mbela.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/882), progress has been made in the implementation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo electoral calendar. At this critical juncture, it is important that all national stakeholders engage constructively in facilitating the holding of the elections according to the provisions of the 31 December 2016 political agreement. It is vital for the peace and stability of the country that the Congolese people be allowed to exercise their democratic rights and choose their leaders in an inclusive and transparent election on 23 December to ensure a peaceful transfer of power.

We are encouraged by the peaceful conclusion of the 29 September political rally in Kinshasa, which was organized by seven opposition leaders; the 1 October demonstrations in Kananga, Central Kasai; and the 4 October meeting of the Independent National Electoral Commission with the 21 presidential candidates or their representatives, who have exchanged information and views on the electoral process.

We hope that all national stakeholders and politicians will respect the interests of their people and refrain from inflammatory rhetoric. In this context, we agree with the call of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, which highlighted the importance the implementation of the confidence-building measures by the Government, as provided in the agreement.

We encourage the Independent National Electoral Commission to utilize United Nations readiness to provide technical and logistical support for the successful conduct of the 23 December elections. The advisory support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in warehouse management, as well as the development and implementation of training strategies and procedures for 440,000 polling staff, besides women's participation, is commendable.

We want to welcome the outcome of the ninth Heads of State summit of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo — the Regional Oversight Mechanism — held in Kampala on 8 October, which was encouraged the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all concerned national stakeholders to create conditions conducive to credible, inclusive and peaceful elections. We also note with satisfaction the invitation extended to the African Union Commission and the Southern African Development Community, which are preparing to deploy electoral observers to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Finally, we welcome the visit of the Director-General of the World Health Organization and Under-Secretary-General Lacroix to the epicentre of the Ebola outbreak to meet with health workers, civil society representatives, United Nations peacekeeping troops and local authorities. Following the adoption of resolution 2439 (2018), the visit by the two senior United Nations officials sent a very good message highlighting the gravity of the Ebola situation and the security challenge. We reiterate our appreciation to MONUSCO for its continued support to the Ebola-response efforts.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her briefing and for her tireless efforts aimed at strengthening peace, stability and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Allow me also to thank Ms. Mbela for sharing with us civil society's views and expectations. Let me seize this opportunity to stress that Poland highly values the input of civil society into the Security Council's work because civil society quite often provides us with a reality check on the ground.

Like other delegations, Poland welcomes the progress achieved this year in the implementation of the electoral calendar, as well as the visible and active involvement of all national stakeholders in the electoral preparations. Poland hopes that the constructive commitment of all the parties will be maintained until the end of the election campaign and in the post-electoral period. We are highly encouraged by Ms. Zerrougui's words that all stakeholders remain committed to the electoral process. In that context, we reiterate our call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities to organize truly fair, credible, transparent and inclusive elections on 23 December.

Poland continues to recognize the building of trust among all political and social actors as a precondition for the establishment of an environment conductive to credible elections. We encourage all stakeholders to continue their engagement through dialogue in order to build political consensus, especially on key contentious issues, including the voting machines and the voter register. Let me also reiterate that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms remains key to a democratic transition of power and the stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this context, persistent reports of restrictions of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and violations of media freedom are of great concern to us.

We are also worried about shrinking space for civil society, as a strong and active civil society remains an essential element of a vital democracy. Furthermore, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. Denis Mukwege underscores the urgent need to address in an effective way the sexual violence faced by so many women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Poland encourages the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to pursue dialogue, fully implement the confidence-building measures contained in the Saint-Sylvestre agreement, ensure a level playing field for all the parties and open public space. We urge the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities to release all political prisoners remaining in detention, including civil society activists and human right defenders.

We note the Government's recent initiative on women's participation in elections, and encourage the authorities to increase their engagement in this regard. The fair and safe participation of both women voters and aspiring women candidates in the ongoing electoral process needs to be assured.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has a significant impact on the stability of Central and sub-Saharan Africa. Poland calls on all regional

and subregional organizations, as well as neighbouring States, to continue their coherent and effective support for the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that context, we welcome the assistance provided by the Southern African Development Community to the electoral process.

In conclusion, the upcoming elections mark an opportunity to take an indispensable step towards lasting security and development of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We express the hope that this chance will not be wasted and that the ambitions of the Congolese society will be fulfilled.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): We join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her insightful briefing. We also extend appreciation to Ms. Joséphine Mbela for her informative update.

On the political front, Kazakhstan positively notes the progress made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the process of preparing for the elections on 23 December, in accordance with the electoral calendar. This nationally owned process should be held with respect for the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We call on the Congolese authorities to continue executing measures to create conditions conducive to holding credible and transparent elections, with the meaningful participation of women in the process. Further efforts must be made by all key political actors to establish a constructive and inclusive dialogue to achieve political progress, and to build confidence in the electoral process. The recent nomination of the joint opposition candidate for the upcoming presidential elections was a positive sign of constructive engagement. We further reiterate the importance of all parties implementing the political agreement of 31 December 2016.

We commend the committed determination of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to assume full responsibility for organizing the elections. In this regard, we welcome the measures taken by the Congolese Government to supply the Independent National Electoral Commission with the means of *transportation necessary for the timely deployment* of electoral materials throughout the country. We also note the peaceful nature of the demonstrations authorized by the Government that were held recently in Kinshasa, and call on all parties to continue to engage in a tolerant and constructive manner. It is also important to provide security for the elections at all stages, which is a prerequisite for credible and peaceful elections. In that regard, we encourage the Congolese authorities to ensure the capacity and coordinated work of the national security forces, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Although the elections are an important step in stabilizing the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we would like to stress the importance of addressing the root causes of the conflict through enhanced support of the international community and regional partners.

On the security front, we are deeply concerned by the continuing activities of armed groups in the east of the country, particularly in Beni, which pose a major challenge to the protection of civilians. We strongly condemn such attacks on civilians, including the abduction of children. Enhancing the response capability of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo is therefore crucial.

With regard to the epidemic situation, we would like to note that while collective measures to tackle the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are working, the epidemic remains dangerous and unpredictable. It is occurring in an area of active conflict, so physical insecurity is a persistent challenge and complicates the ongoing response efforts. We pay tribute to the dedicated staff of the World Health Organization, MONUSCO, the Ministry of Health and all partners who are fighting a dangerous outbreak in extremely difficult conditions. It is obvious that further effective response measures on the part of the international community are needed.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): There are only 39 days left before the elections — the first in the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo leading to a democratic handover of power. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and her team for their good offices and excellent briefing. We also thank Ms. Mbela for her statement, which provided the necessary additional context on the electoral process.

Today, I would like to address three points: first, the progress of the preparations for the elections; secondly, the need to further open the political space; and thirdly,

our concerns about the deterioration of the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the progress made in the implementation of the electoral calendar. These include the distribution of equipment and the training of polling station staff. We also welcome the invitation to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union and the Carter Center to send independent observers. They will play an important role alongside the 40,000 local observers. We also encourage political parties and citizens to be certified as election witnesses.

The Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2018/882) that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Independent National Electoral Commission are working together to increase women's participation. We applaud their efforts and urge all parties to use these final days to strengthen women's participation in this election. We remind the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that MONUSCO remains ready to contribute to logistical support. Much progress has been made in recent months, but challenges remain, such as a lack of trust and restricted political space. We call on all political parties to campaign constructively and to help find compromises to meet these challenges.

This brings me to my second point, concerning the need to open the political space further. We congratulate the Congolese Government on having recently authorized several demonstrations, which took place peacefully. Other demonstrations, however, have been banned in several major cities. We once again urge the authorities to lift the total ban on demonstrations and to respect freedom of expression. We remind the authorities of their promise to release 130 political prisoners, including high-profile cases, in accordance with the New Year's Eve agreement.

With the start of the campaign, it is essential to build trust and to find consensus between the political parties and the Independent National Electoral Commission. In that regard, we welcome the opening of dialogue on 4 October and encourage all actors to work together in a constructive spirit. We congratulate all political parties on maintaining their commitment to participating in the process.

The stakes of this historic election are immense. A huge task awaits the winner, since he or she will have to face the humanitarian and security challenges that persist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thirdly, I would like to address the deterioration of the security situation in the east of the country. The number of armed groups has increased significantly. Attacks on civilians and humanitarian personnel in the Beni region are unacceptable. They threaten the already uncertain fight against the Ebola epidemic, which has been the largest in Congolese history to date. We welcome the important work of MONUSCO in the protection of civilians in this context. It is essential that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the international community work together to stabilize Beni and gain the trust of local people. In that regard, we welcome on this subject the recent visit of Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Ghebreyesus.

In other areas, including around Bijombo, the population is still suffering the consequences of violent conflict and human rights violations. The humanitarian crisis continues to deteriorate, and we call on all Member States to increase their contribution to the humanitarian assistance plan. We call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring States to implement the compliance framework of the Political and Security Committee of the European Union, and to cooperate on the issue of internally displaced persons, including with a view to their return, in accordance with international human rights law.

In conclusion, we are witnessing a decisive moment in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a moment that the Congolese people have been hoping for. In order to permanently eliminate the root causes of the conflict and instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is crucial to ensure that a democratic transfer of power follows credible, peaceful and transparent elections. The Congolese citizens will cast their votes and judge the credibility of the process. At this final stage, the Council and its regional partners, including the African Union, SADC, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, should continue to closely monitor the situation.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her thorough briefing on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the preparations for the

elections to be held on 23 December. We also take note of the statement by Ms. Joséphine Mbela.

We continue to believe that holding the planned elections according to schedule will help reduce the political tensions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As is evident in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2018/886) and as we all had the opportunity to see for ourselves during the Security Council mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the technical and legislative groundwork for the elections is happening in line with the Independent National Electoral Commission's electoral calendar. It is important that once the electoral rolls had been audited, a final version, without duplications or inaccuracies, was published. We have noted the publication of the final lists of candidates, and we are pleased that half of the country's political parties have signed the election code of conduct.

The political contest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is intensifying and its political forces are consolidating. In that regard, we call on the Congolese parties to adhere to the comprehensive political agreement of 31 December 2016. We do not deny how important it is to ensure that the Congolese authorities step up their implementation of confidence-building measures, and that also applies to the so-called emblematic cases mentioned in the political agreement regarding political actors living abroad. We once again call for respect for the sovereignty and laws of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the same time, we urge the opposition forces to abandon negative agendas, play by the established rules of the game and respect decisions already handed down by the Congolese judicial bodies. The question of the fairness of such decisions is not part of the Security Council's remit, although for the sake of fairness, we should point out that in reviewing lawsuits about electoral issues, the Constitutional Court has already reached verdicts in favour of opposition parties.

We urge colleagues not to obsess about the situation regarding the Electoral Commission's decision to use electronic voting machines, which is the sovereign prerogative of the relevant Congolese bodies. As we were able to see at first-hand during the Security Council's visit, they are essentially printing devices for ensuring the rapid output of ballots in a compact form. It is our understanding that the Electoral Commission is already making logistical preparations for the holding of elections. We agree that it is essential to ensure that Kinshasa provides reliable funding for the electoral process in order to avoid disruptions. We respect the Government's decision to rely mainly on its own resources in dealing with this issue and note that the next instalment of funds for pre-election needs was disbursed in October. However, we also want to point out that the logistical capabilities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) should not be forgotten.

As we understand it, the Mission's role in organizing and conducting elections should not go beyond the mandate established in resolution 2409 (2018). The protection of civilians in the context of elections must be carried out with full respect for the basic principles of peacekeeping and without any interference in Kinshasa's internal affairs.

I want to emphasize that the elections by themselves will not be able to resolve every single one of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's problems. We must focus on addressing the underlying causes of the crisis. We urge everyone not to forget about the importance of continuing to fight the illegal armed groups in the east of the country, which still pose a threat to civilians and are capable of destabilizing the Great Lakes region. We definitely believe that solving that problem should be seen as the main indicator for the country's stabilization and the withdrawal of MONUSCO, whose chief function, after all, is dealing with the security situation.

It will be impossible to stabilize the situation in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo through military measures alone. The implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region must continue, along with assistance in strengthening State governance institutions and restoring social institutions in areas that have been liberated from the insurgents.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Special Representative Zerrougui and Ms. Mbela for their briefings. I would particularly like to thank Ms. Mbela for her brave work as a human rights activist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for making such clear recommendations to the Council, her Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission. I hope to touch on some of those recommendations later.

As both of our briefers and many of my colleagues today have made clear, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a crucial point in its history. The elections scheduled for 23 December could lead to the country's first peaceful democratic transfer of power. That would be a huge achievement for the 85 million Congolese people who have faced such devastating conflicts over their history. These elections are about more than merely democratic rights. Successful elections have the ability to enhance the political security and humanitarian stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, which in turn can enable future security, growth, trade and prosperity.

A stable, prosperous Democratic Republic of the Congo is vital not only for the Congolese people but also for the region and the world. As we have seen over many years, the insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not only had a negative impact on millions of Congolese people, it has devastated the wider region. It is therefore entirely appropriate that we as a Council hold regular discussions, follow the situation closely and ensure that there is follow-up to the Security Council's visit of just over a month ago, particularly in order to take stock of what progress is being made on many of the commitments undertaken by the Government and other political leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I think it is important to register the positive developments in recent months. We welcome the positive steps that the Government has taken with regard to elections, including on voter registration and the publication of the final list of candidates for the elections. We also welcome President Kabila's repeated commitment that he does not intend to stand for a third term, in accordance with the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But as Ambassador Haley reminded us earlier today, democracy is not about a single event, it is about a process. So we call on all political actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to create the conditions for free, fair and credible elections, particularly by implementing the confidence-building measures of the 31 December 2016 agreement so as to ensure that civil and political rights are upheld. That includes fully respecting the political space and allowing political parties to gather peacefully.

We welcome the commitment made by President Kabila to the Security Council during our visit that his Government would allow peaceful protests by the opposition. We are therefore deeply concerned about reports of further arrests and detentions of protesters and the continued detention of political prisoners. We call on President Kabila and his Government to live up to their commitments to allow peaceful protest by the opposition and to release all political prisoners.

Political parties and their leadership must also do their part and encourage their supporters to engage peacefully in the democratic process. Any violence will diminish the credibility of the elections in the eyes of the Congolese people and the international community. We also call on the key political actors, including the opposition, to engage constructively with the electoral process, including with regard to the vexed question of voting machines and the voter registry. The Electoral Commission's efforts will be crucial to delivering a credible election, and we join Ms. Mbela in her call to the Commission to engage with key stakeholders in order to address their concerns and restore confidence in the electoral process. One way to restore confidence in the electoral process and the elections, and particularly in the voting machines, is by implementing the recommendations of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. We were encouraged by the fact that during the Council's visit to Kinshasa, the Electoral Commission said it was determined to implement the Foundation's recommendations, and we urge it to continue to implement them as soon as possible in order to increase confidence in the voting machines.

We commend the logistical support that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has provided for the upcoming elections so far, and welcome the fact that it is ready to give further support if needed at the Government's request. We call on the Electoral Commission to engage with MONUSCO as soon as possible for any logistical assistance that it may need. The United Kingdom stands ready to support the political process both in the region, where we have provided funding for voter education, civil-society engagement, women's participation and domestic observation, and here at the United Nations.

In conclusion, it is not the politicians who stand to win or lose the most in these elections. It is the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who have seen devastating levels of conflict and the resulting humanitarian suffering since independence. We therefore call on all leaders to put aside their personal ambition and to do what is right for their people — participating in and supporting what is

potentially the first of many credible elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and Ms. Joséphine Mbela, civil-society representative, for their valuable briefings.

We are less than two months away from the most important event in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the holding of presidential and legislative elections at the national and provincial levels. We hope they will be held on schedule on 23 December so that the Democratic Republic of the Congo can enjoy the first democratic and peaceful transfer of power in its history. The commitment of the Congolese Government to the electoral calendar and the announcement by a majority of political and national parties that they will participate in the elections are positive and hopeful signs. We hope they will culminate in secure, total transparent and credible elections that can realize the aspirations of the Congolese people to security, stability and reconstruction.

Despite the fact that the presidential elections are fast approaching, we will continue to stress the importance of taking advantage of the remaining time to make concrete progress in implementing the confidence-building measures stipulated in the political agreement of 31 December 2016, ensuring that the political process includes all sectors of the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The publication on 19 September of the electoral rolls, along with the efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission — including a meeting with presidential candidates or their representatives to share information and views on the electoral proce[illegible] — will all contribute to the smooth holding of the elections. The issue of voting machines, however, continues to pose a significant challenge. We hope the Government will be able to deal with it by reaching a consensus among all the political parties.

Given the significance of the event that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is about to go through, the weight of which we felt first-hand during the Council's recent visit, we hope that it will help to end the political tensions and security challenges in the country. We also hope that the Congolese Government will support the election process by ensuring an environment conducive to freedom of expression and by allowing peaceful protests to take place. We appreciate the Government's commitment to financing the electoral process with its own resources. We are also looking forward to seeing it cooperate with MONUSCO so that the necessary logistical and technical assistance for holding the elections is provided. In that regard, we value the role played by regional organizations at this critical juncture in the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The persistent humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is extremely worrying. The statistics on the humanitarian situation of refugees, displaced persons and others in need of urgent assistance are alarming. According to the November *Humanitarian Bulletin* of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 10.5 million people are receiving emergency assistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is disturbing and makes it incumbent on the international community and the Congolese Government to redouble their efforts to deal with that difficult situation.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep concern about the persistence of Ebola in the country's eastern regions, as well as the worsening security situation there, which undermines efforts to counter the epidemic and the return of refugees from neighbouring countries. It poses a serious threat to civilians and a direct problem for neighbouring countries. In that regard, we greatly appreciate the joint efforts to counter the Ebola epidemic of the Congolese Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations, represented by MONUSCO. We also commend the joint visit last week by the Director-General of WHO and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to assess the Ebola outbreak. We hope that all such efforts will continue in order to eradicate that epidemic as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Zerrougui for her briefing. I appreciate her efforts to promote peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and China will

continue to support her work. I would also like to thank Ms. Mbela for her briefing.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has recently been working actively to maintain domestic peace and stability, promote dialogue among all the political parties and ease intercommunal tensions in the Kasai region. The Independent National Electoral Commission is fully functioning and forging ahead steadily with preparations for the elections. This is a clear demonstration of the firm commitment of the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to safeguarding national peace and stability with a Congolese-led approach and achieving a smooth transfer of power by holding peaceful elections. China commends the efforts of the Government and the Electoral Commission in that regard.

The Security Council and the international community should fully respect and acknowledge the aspirations and efforts of the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the same time, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is still facing challenges on issues such as mutual trust among political parties and armed groups in the eastern part of the country. Moreover, there is a risk that the Ebola epidemic in certain north-eastern regions may spread.

While respecting the Democratic Republic of the Congo's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, the Security Council and the international community must provide it with constructive assistance.

The priority now is to ensure that the elections are held smoothly. All of the country's stakeholders should act in the country's fundamental interests, resolve their differences peacefully through dialogue and consultations and work together to advance the electoral and political processes.

The international community should respect the right of the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to lead the political process. The African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as well as other regional and subregional organizations, should enhance their coordination and cooperation and play an active role in mediation.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has played an important role in the maintenance of peace and stability in the country. China hopes that MONUSCO will continue to enhance its communication, coordination and consultation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and perform its functions in accordance with its mandate.

The international community should continue to respond actively to the appeal for humanitarian assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and support the work of the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross with a view to containing the Ebola outbreaks.

China will continue to work with the international community to achieve peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, based on national ownership, as soon as possible.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of November. I am particularly pleased to salute, through you, the friendly country of the People's Republic of China, with which the Democratic Republic of the Congo enjoys excellent relations. I would also like to thank you for taking the initiative to organize this important meeting to consider the electoral process and the implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would also like to thank all the members of the Council for their unwavering interest in the situation in my country.

I should not omit to greet Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and to express our appreciation for her very informative briefing.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey the views of my Government on the issues under discussion, as we have always done when addressing the Council. Before doing so, however, I should point out that as the report under consideration (S/2018/882) underscores, the political situation in my country remains focused on the elections of 23 December, for which preparations

are going well. In fact, a month or so before the long-awaited date, we have completed all the activities scheduled to be done by this date, in line with the Independent National Electoral Commission's electoral calendar. The current and pending activities can be broken down into the areas of recruiting and training the 511,901 electoral agents; educating and raising the awareness of voters and civic educators, including on the use of the voting machines and the application of the code of conduct; training the trainers of officials for polling and counting stations and local centres for compiling results; deploying electoral equipment throughout the country and accrediting witnesses, observers and journalists.

With regard to electoral equipment, it is important to point out here that the various logistics centres around the country — in Matadi, Kinshasa, Bunia, Kisangani, Goma and Lubumbashi — have received the voting booths, polling and counting station kits, ballot boxes and other accessories. The same goes for the voting machines, which arrived at the port of Matadi to be sent to the country's western and central provinces and at the ports of Dar es Salaam and Mombasa to be assigned to polling stations in the eastern provinces. With regard to logistics, the Government has provided the Electoral Commission with land, air and sea equipment, including motor vehicles, aeroplanes, helicopters, motorcycles and speedboats, along with a total of $50 million to enable their deployment throughout the country. Regarding funding, everything is going according to the established disbursement plan and showing an implementation rate of more than 72 per cent. The Government is working to provide the Commission with the $122 million in funding required for the remaining critical stages.

On the security front, additional police units have been recruited and trained. They will be deployed shortly in accordance with a security plan whose implementation should shortly be fixed through a new regulatory act. Some of those units will also be used for security for the candidates for the presidency of the Republic.

Concerning the management of electoral disputes, courts of appeal have been set up in the country's 26 provinces and the magistrates who will lead them have been appointed, assigned and trained. They have already done good work in managing disputes that have arisen during the submission of candidacies and have made proposals for improving and securing their workplaces.

To return to the issues that continue to be sources of concern for the opposition and some members of civil society, as noted in the report under discussion, my delegation was pleased that the Council members were able to make a working visit in October to Kinshasa, where they had the opportunity to discuss all these issues with Electoral Commission officials and my country's authorities, as well as all other stakeholders in the electoral process.

I firmly believe that where the voting machines are concerned, our discussions and the testing of the machines that was done on the ground will now have ended any apprehensions that Council members may previously have had about their use. In our view, the fact is that when we are dealing with 35,016 candidates for three combined elections that will all be held at once, the voting machines — compared to a 54-page electoral register with photos of all the candidates — is manually the easiest for voters to use. The representatives of the political opposition and civil society whom the Commission invited to test the machines can also attest to this. They understand that the machines cannot undermine the reliability of the voting results because, as we have already explained, the machine merely prints out the ballot paper that the elector deposits in the ballot box. After this operation, the counting will be done manually before witnesses and observers.

As it has done for the voting machines, the Electoral Commission has also provided clarifications for the electoral register. It was audited by the International Organization of la Francophonie, who concluded that it was inclusive, comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date. It now numbers 40,024,897 voters. The provisional lists were posted for consultations on potential amendments, and 6,500,318 voters' names were expunged from them following a purging process and another 337,208 following the audit, so that 40,024,897 voters now remain on the electoral lists. As for the 6 million voters who were registered without fingerprints, the International Organization of La Francophonie, which carried out the audit of the electoral register and noted the issue, emphasized in its conclusions that it did not jeopardize the voting status of those concerned.

With regard to the implementation of the confidence-building measures and restrictions on the political space, I would be grateful not to have to repeat the explanations that have already been provided to the Council on many previous occasions. In our humble opinion, however, it is important to

note that the Government has already taken a number of measures to meet the requirements outlined in the political agreement of 31 December 2016 regarding the release of the so-called political prisoners. All those classified in that category have been released, with the exception of two people who are still being held for ordinary infractions rather than for political reasons. In view of that, my delegation therefore does not share the view stated in paragraph 16 of the report that no progress has been made in implementing the confidence-building measures.

On the contrary, with regard to restrictions on the political space, we feel we can say that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is now one of the countries in the Central African region whose citizens — politicians, ordinary civilians, journalists and activists of various kinds — enjoy a very broad and sometimes perhaps excessive scope of freedoms. With 601 political parties, 476 radio stations, 210 television channels and 445 print and other media outlets, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is setting a record in terms of political freedom and expression. Of course, not everything is perfect, as is true of any country. But we remain open and always do our best to adapt to the requirements of human rights and democracy. In that regard, as the report acknowledges, the public protests held in Kananga, Kasai Central and Kinshasa are generally permitted. If some in other parts of the country have not been authorized, that is not in any way meant to stifle freedom of speech, assembly or expression but rather to protect public order.

To close this chapter, my Government would like to assure Council members that the electoral campaign, which will begin in nine days, will be conducted in full respect for electoral law. All the candidates will be treated equally and have access to the media under the same conditions. They will be entirely free to campaign. It is important to note that these will be only the third elections to be held in the country's history. Given their importance, all candidates will be called on to adhere to the code of conduct established by the National Independent Electoral Commission for the smooth holding of the elections. The stakes are high, but things must not get out of hand.

To touch on the security situation, while things seem relatively calm elsewhere in the country generally, the situation in the Beni and Butembo areas in North Kivu remains worrying in the wake of repeated attacks by some armed groups, particularly the Allied Democratic Forces. That situation could have a negative impact on the holding of the elections in that part of the country, as well as on the management of the response to the Ebola epidemic. That is why my country welcomes the joint operation to address the attacks recently launched by the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo and MONUSCO. As for the Ebola outbreak, my Government, together with the support of our partners, is continuing its efforts to eradicate it.

As we have previously emphasized in addressing the Council, my Government believes that the road to the elections is irreversible. The Congolese people are determined and are preparing to exercise their sovereign right to elect their leaders on 23 December. In that context, the Council will agree with us that those who call for the rejection of the voting machines and a new assessment of the electoral register just a few weeks before the elections are not actually ready for the elections, or have no real wish to participate in them. Now that the process is coming to an end, my Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo expect the international community and the United Nations to provide the necessary support and guidance for its successful conclusion. I should not conclude without thanking all those who are directly or indirectly committed to my country's cause so as to enable it to restore the stability and lasting peace that we so sorely need to rebuild it. To all the members of the Security Council, I reiterate our deep appreciation.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.

United Nations S/PV 8398

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8398th meeting

Wednesday, 14 November 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Michon
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Letter dated 7 November 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/1002)

Letter dated 7 November 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/1003)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

Letter dated 7 November 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/1002)

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The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Djibouti, Eritrea and Somalia to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/1010, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/1002, which contains a letter dated 7 November 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council. I wish to also draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/1003, which contains a letter dated 7 November 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2444 (2018).

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I welcome our colleagues from Djibouti, Eritrea and Somalia.

I should like to thank Council members for their unanimous support for resolution 2444 (2018). It lifts sanctions on Eritrea. It sets out the Council's continued support for efforts to improve peace and security in Somalia.

The agreement to lift sanctions on Eritrea recognizes the improvements in regional peace and security and the positive steps Eritrea has taken to meet the demands of the Security Council, and it is right that in the light of such developments we reconsider the measures. It is also right that we continue to urge dialogue between Eritrea and Djibouti on the Djiboutian combatants missing in action and on the resolution of their border dispute. We look forward to continued efforts to normalize relations between both countries and we stand ready to assist.

Turning to Somalia, we condemn in the strongest terms the horrific attacks in Mogadishu on Friday. It is clear that Al-Shabaab continues to pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of Somalia and the region. This resolution underlines our full support for the Somali authorities in their efforts to combat this threat. In this context, we welcome the progress made to date on security reform. Further progress is now essential to implementing the national security architecture and make full use of integrated regional Somali forces to deliver a successful transition to Somali-led security. Coordinated international engagement will remain key. We also look forward to further cooperation between the Somali authorities and the reconstituted Panel of Experts on the implementation of the arms embargo.

I think that the countries concerned and the region deserve to be congratulated on the important steps forward that they have taken, which have made this resolution possible today. Not only is it a very important step for the countries of the region, but I think it also sends a helpful wider signal to the international community that if the right steps are taken, sanctions can be lifted. The United Kingdom has the pleasure to continue to offer its full support to the Somali authorities, the Djiboutian and Eritrean authorities, the Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, and the Panel of Experts in their efforts to support peace and stability.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): At the outset, I would like to welcome Ambassador Abukar Dahir Osman, Permanent Representative of Somalia, Ambassador Mohamed Siad Doualeh, Permanent Representative of Djibouti, and Mr. Amanuel Giorgio, Chargé d'affaires of Eritrea.

I welcome unreservedly the adoption of resolution 2444 (2018). We greatly appreciate the United Kingdom for its efforts as penholder in facilitating the negotiations on resolution 2444 (2018) and all Security Council members for voting in favour of the resolution. We fully support the resolution drafted by the United Kingdom, which we believe is balanced and the result of a consensus made in the negotiations over the last couple of days. We commend the role played by the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea and the Committee established pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, which has done great work in supporting peace and security in the Horn of Africa.

The whole trajectory of future development in our subregion has changed fundamentally in recent months. Countries of the region have opened a new chapter of normalizing relations, resulting in relations that truly reflect the long-standing historical ties among our peoples. This has already had enormous implications for the work of the Committee and the sanctions regime as a whole. It also has great significance for regional and international peace and stability.

We have adopted this resolution today at a time when a major historic development is unfolding in the Horn of Africa. The breakthrough arising from the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea is already producing unprecedented and far-reaching positive consequences and is significantly changing the political landscape of the Horn of Africa and beyond. It is highly appropriate for the Security Council to take this decisive decision at the time when countries of the region are turning a new page in their relations.

The Horn of Africa has tremendous potential for shared development and prosperity, provided that there is durable peace and stability. The Council decision today will help to capitalize on the opportunities we are now creating to transform the region into a zone of peace and prosperity and usher in a new era of friendship among all the countries of the region. It is with this conviction that, last July, my Prime Minister formally submitted a request to the United Nations to lift the sanctions imposed on Eritrea. Therefore, today, we are very pleased that the Council responded positively by lifting the sanctions on Eritrea.

For our part, we are fully committed to forging ever closer political, economic, social and security cooperation with all the peoples and Governments of the Horn of Africa. This will serve and advance the interests of our peoples and ensure regional peace, development and cooperation.

A lifting of the sanctions regime on Eritrea does not, of course, mean that the region is free of challenges. We still face problems that require effort and determination to resolve. We still need the help and serious support of the international community. But, for our part, we are determined to accelerate efforts being taken to create a region where peace, development and democracy prevail in harmony. We are confident that the international community will stand in solidarity to support us as we continue to move forward towards greater peace, stability and economic integration in the Horn of Africa.

It is also encouraging to note how far Somalia has come in recent years. At the same time, the rebuilding and reconstruction of the country still requires sustained engagement and support. Somalia has indeed reached an important phase in consolidating its State institutions, but Al-Shabaab remains the greatest challenge, as it is capable of creating destruction in Somalia and beyond.

The security situation remains volatile, and Al-Shabaab continues to present a serious danger to the peace and security of Somalia and the region as a whole. The string of deadly bomb attacks last Friday claimed the lives of over 50 innocent civilians and injured many more. It was a reflection of the continuous threat being posed by the group. It underlined the importance of doing everything possible to minimize Al-Shabaab's

acquisition of arms and funds, as well as the necessity to control its activities.

It is particularly important at this critical juncture not to divert attention from the current process as the Government prepares for the very important transition towards elections in 2020. The Council must continue to provide the fullest possible assistance to sustaining the Government and the transition. We must avoid the risk of seeing the gains achieved so far reversed; these are gains that were made with enormous sacrifices by the Somalis and others in the region.

Finally, Ethiopia will continue to be involved closely, constructively and in a principled manner, in all efforts aimed at settling outstanding issues in good faith.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): We welcome the adoption of resolution 2444 (2018) this morning.

The historic the historic and significant developments in the Horn of Africa that we have witnessed over the past year, triggered by the Eritrean-Ethiopian reconciliation, have dramatically changed the dynamics in the region and open a new chapter of peace and cooperation. The basis for the restrictive measures against Eritrea adopted almost a decade ago is no longer in place, which is why we supported the resolution. It is imperative that the Security Council continues to support the courageous decisions taken by the leaders in the region, as these developments will have far-reaching and positive consequences for the greater Horn of Africa region and beyond. As the Secretary General said in his address to the General Assembly, despite the chaos and confusion in our world, there are also winds of hope blowing around the globe (see A/73/PV.6).

The developments in the Horn of Africa represent a unique opportunity that promises to bring not only stability to the region but also allows its countries and peoples to reap the benefits of the political, economic and social cooperation that will follow. It shows how regional cooperation can turn the page on war and conflict. There is still hard work ahead to secure the full potential of the peace dividends. We need to offer our full support in seizing the opportunities and addressing remaining concerns. In this regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's recent decision to expand the mandate of the Special Envoy to the Sudan and South Sudan to include the entire Horn of Africa. It will give the United Nations greater ability to support and facilitate further positive developments in terms of peace and security, human rights, stability and ultimately development, economic growth and welfare.

Turning to Somalia, the sanctions regime in place continues to play a critical role in supporting the international effort to defeat Al-Shabaab, through averting the flow of illicit arms and preventing the group from raising funds, while at the same time allowing the important build-up of the Somalia national forces, as Somalia is preparing to take greater charge of its own security. Our continued strong support to the State-building and peacebuilding processes in the Somali region will be crucial, and we must stay the course together with the Somali people in keeping up the momentum and build on what has already been achieved.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): First, we would like to thank the delegation of United Kingdom for drafting today's very important resolution (resolution 2444 (2018)). We also welcome the representatives of Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti in the Chamber.

We would like to highlight that this year has been marked by unprecedented positive and very welcome developments in the Horn of Africa. In the last few months, we have witnessed the historic rapprochement among countries of the region, led by the great vision and determined political will of their leaders. Today we see the fruitful results of courageous choices made by the States of the region to close an era of long-protracted tensions, conflict and competition, and which have instead paved the way for a new era of peaceful and mutually-beneficial cooperation.

We join the international community in recognizing and commending the efforts of Ethiopia's new leadership to initiate and promote a constructive and forward-looking dynamism at the regional level, aimed at enabling the nations of the region to advance towards a long-awaited, peaceful and prosperous future. The countries of the Horn of Africa have demonstrated a resolute capacity and commitment to finding solutions to regional problems. While we commend the fast progress that has been made, we are mindful of the perils as well as the challenges and impediments that lie ahead in the work of creating durable peace and prosperity in the region.

It is important that the United Nations and its States Members and international organizations meaningfully support the momentous changes that are rapidly

unfolding. They unquestionably have far-reaching implications for the security and prosperity of the broader region, and we must ensure that these gains are consolidated. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's decision to expand the mandate of the Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan to cover the Horn of Africa as well. Closer collaboration between the United Nations, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development will enable us to build on the recent strides that have been made towards peace and security and enhance subregional strategies to address security and development issues. Diplomacy, mediation, confidence-building and dialogue, together with development investments, are the sure ways to resolve the existing disputes between countries. We welcome the engagement between Djibouti and Eritrea and encourage them to engage in further efforts to resolve the remaining challenges in their bilateral relationship.

With regard to Somalia, we strongly condemn the 9 November terrorist attack in Mogadishu and express our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and the Government of Somalia. That horrific act of violence reminds us of the fragility of Somalia's security situation and the importance of making every effort to preserve its hard-earned stability. Along with that, we are very pleased to be able to recognize the Federal Government's achievements in its efforts to rebuild its conflict-torn nation. We commend and support the comprehensive reform agenda and vision for development of Somalia's leadership. We would like to stress the importance of the sustained and coordinated support of the international community for the recovery and stabilization processes in Somalia, including by addressing the root causes of the crisis.

Kazakhstan has added its voice in support of today's adoption of resolution 2444 (2018), based on its own resolve and conviction with regard to peace and prosperity in Africa. As Chair of the Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, Kazakhstan was privileged to be a part of the positive outcome of today's Council meeting, and particularly happy to contribute to the peaceful process in the Horn of Africa. We strongly believe that the recent progress in the Horn of Africa could serve as an example regarding conflicts in other parts of Africa and the rest of the world.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate both the leadership and the people of Eritrea on the lifting of the Security Council's sanctions. We have long said that the international restrictions against Eritrea were irrelevant. Over all these years no convincing evidence has been produced for Asmara's support to destructive forces in the region, and in the wake of the changes that have occurred in the Horn of Africa, the classification of the dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea as a threat to international peace and security was also outdated. We hope that the Council's adoption today of resolution 2444 (2018) will be a significant milestone in the work of strengthening friendly and good-neighbourly relations in the region. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Council is indebted to Ethiopia and its Prime Minister, Mr. Abiy Ahmed, whose brave and decisive actions did a great deal to ensure the outcome of today's vote.

Of course, the resolution will not deal with all of the region's chronic issues in one fell swoop, to coin a phrase. We hope in particular that it will be a stimulus for promoting the normalization of relations between Eritrea and Djibouti. At the same time, however, we believe that the work of settling all the issues outstanding between the two countries belongs to bilateral diplomacy. If necessary, the parties can use the good offices of mediators and other purpose-built international mechanisms. In that regard, we consider that the regular and, what is most surprising, the indefinite reporting imposed by a group of countries looks like an outrageously excessive demand.

We regret the fact that the authors of the resolution included provisions affirming sexual and gender-based violence as a separate criterion for the imposition of sanctions, despite the fact that such behaviour is covered under the existing listing criteria. I want to remind the Council once again that issues pertaining to sanctions are clearly regulated under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which is about the presence of threats to international peace and security. Any broader interpretation of that position runs the risk of a loss of sanctions instruments' effectiveness and, what is worse, their relevance. With regard to other countries subject to sanctions we have explained many times the negative consequences of such moves for the Council's work. Let me emphasize once again that this issue is not part of our direct remit. If we want to discuss such issues, we have the Human Rights Council and the Commission on the Status of Women. We should respect the appropriate division of labour in that regard.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): The United States welcomes Eritrea's rapprochement with its neighbours. We are encouraged by its stated commitment to re-engaging in an effort to establish enduring peace and regional cooperation and to opening the door to its reintegration. This is a historic moment and a great opportunity for the Horn of Africa. But there is much more to do, particularly in addressing the questions regarding the disposition of missing Djiboutian troops and the final status of the Djibouti-Eritrea border.

We believe that the recent engagement between the two countries strongly suggests that their political will and intent are strong enough to reach a solution with the support of the international community. We are satisfied with the Council's agreement on resolution 2444 (2018), which pays particular attention to the importance of ensuring that Eritrea and Djibouti follow through on their commitments to resolving these matters, and we continue to call on all parties to cooperate in order to reach a satisfactory outcome. The United States predicates its support for lifting the United Nations sanctions on Eritrea on the current lack of evidence connecting Eritrea to Al-Shabaab. We appreciate the efforts of the Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, and of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, to carry out their mandates in that regard.

We strongly support the renewal of the Sanctions Committee's mandate to focus on Somalia. There is no doubt that Somalia has made significant progress over the past decade, due in large part to the support of its regional partners and the international community as a whole. However, Somali capacity, including regarding the implementation of the remaining arms restrictions and the ban on the trade of Somali charcoal, remains limited owing to the country's security conditions, corruption and uneven progress in governance. We are confident that the Panel of Experts on Somalia will remain diligent in faithfully fulfilling its mandate, especially as it relates to comprehensive investigations and reporting.

The United States will continue to support Somalia in its efforts to stabilize the country for its people, including by ensuring that the international community takes all appropriate measures to maintain the integrity of the sanctions regime.

Mr. Michon (France) (*spoke in French*): France takes note of the Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2444 (2018). From the outset France has given unwavering support to the ongoing rapprochement process in the Horn of Africa. This is a historic development, creating unprecedented opportunities for stabilization and development in the region. France would therefore like to commend the courageous decision of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia, without whom these developments would not have been possible.

It is the Security Council's responsibility to support these developments in the Horn of Africa, including by lifting the sanctions on Eritrea. Nevertheless, we believe that the Security Council still has legitimate demands with regard to Eritrea. First and foremost, the Eritrean authorities must cooperate with the Council, given that the Panel of Experts on Somalia has not been able visit Eritrea since 2011. Above all, Eritrea must give concrete signs that it wants to work with Djibouti to settle the issues of the border dispute between the two countries and of the Djibouti prisoners of war, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2385 (2017). Those two issues continue to be unresolved, as the resolution that we have adopted today acknowledges. In that context, while France welcomed the meeting in Jeddah in September between the Presidents of Djibouti and Eritrea, we now expect that meeting to lead to concrete progress on the ground and a commitment to moving forward together.

In that regard, we believe it is crucial to ensure that no country in the region is left on the sidelines during the evolving situation in the Horn of Africa. France therefore welcomes the fact that with this resolution, the Security Council commits to regular monitoring of developments in the relationship between Eritrea and Djibouti in order to support peace, stabilization and reconciliation in the Horn of Africa. We are of course ready to work in coordination with all of the stakeholders in the region to contribute to strengthening this regional dynamic.

With regard to Somalia, France is of the view that the sanctions regime remains crucial to combating illicit trafficking in arms and Somali charcoal, which fuels the terrorist group Al-Shabaab, still the main threat to Somalia's security. In that regard, I would like to express France's condolences to the Somali authorities and to the families of the victims of the terrible terrorist attacks on Mogadishu on Friday, 9 November. I would also like

to point out that the Somalia sanctions regime is aimed mainly at supporting the Somali Federal Government in their fight against terrorism. The exemptions from the arms embargo that the sanctions regime provides for enable them to acquire the equipment they need to combat terrorist groups, with the support of their international partners. It is therefore in the interests of the Somali Federal Government to pursue effective cooperation with the Panel of Experts on Somalia.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Poland welcomes the Council's adoption of resolution 2444 (2018), renewing the measures on Somalia for one year and lifting the sanctions regime on Eritrea. We would like to thank the United Kingdom for its constructive and efficient conduct of the negotiations on the document.

We acknowledge the importance of the sanctions regime in the case of Somalia, where the Federal Government is in the process of taking over full responsibility for the country's security and where Al-Shabaab continues to pose a serious threat to stability. We hope that the renewed measures will help to limit Al-Shabaab's access to arms and financing and strengthen the Government's State-building efforts.

To reiterate what we have stated on numerous occasions in recent months: Poland welcomes the developments in the Horn of Africa, especially the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the positive dynamic between Eritrea and Djibouti. We believe that sanctions are not a punishment but a policy tool, and that they should be subject to regular review and adjusted to the realities on the ground. In line with that approach, we have supported the lifting of the sanctions regime on Eritrea. We hope that recent encouraging events will enable durable peace to be achieved across the region. At the same time, we believe that the Security Council should closely follow the normalization between Eritrea and Djibouti and stand ready to support the two countries' efforts to peacefully resolve their differences.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I would first like to welcome our colleagues from Djibouti, Somalia and Eritrea to the Council.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has a long-standing and strong commitment to peace and development in the Horn of Africa. That is why we voted in favour of resolution 2444 (2018) today. We see our decision as a tribute to the positive developments that have taken place in the region.

The peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea represents a historic step. It paves the way for improved bilateral relations and stronger regional peace and stability. We welcome Eritrea's decision to start engaging with the international community and working to consolidate the peace agreement. Those are important steps, and we encourage Eritrea to build on that momentum to give impulse to domestic governance reforms, including reform of the economy, the national service, democratization and human rights. In particular, we call on Eritrea to cooperate better with international mechanisms, especially those related to human rights.

The positive developments in the Horn of Africa do not relieve the Council of its responsibility to monitor progress closely. In particular, we underline the need for concrete steps in the normalization of relations between Eritrea and Djibouti. That is why we welcome the Council's decision to remain seized of the matter by asking for regular reporting on this important issue. We also emphasize that the Council's other decisions and demands regarding Eritrea remain valid. That includes its decision, stated in resolution 2023 (2011), by which Eritrea must cease using illicit means to collect taxes outside Eritrea.

Finally, we welcome the renewal of the Somalia sanctions measures as essential support to the Somali Government in its efforts to deliver stability and security in Somalia. We especially welcome the addition of stand-alone sanctions criteria for sexual and gender-based violence. Those who commit such heinous acts should know that today the Council showed its commitment to responding to such practices.

In conclusion, as others have done, we condemn in the strongest terms the horrific terrorist attacks in Mogadishu last Friday.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we would like to thank the United Kingdom for drafting resolution 2444 (2018). We also welcome the representatives of Djibouti, Eritrea and Somalia.

The delegation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea voted in favour of resolution 2444 (2018) in view of the fresh dynamic that has emerged in the Horn of Africa, with the exception of the continued threats and potential atrocities from the terrorist organization Al-Shabaab, which the resolution also takes into account. My delegation has been closely following events in the Horn

of Africa since the current six-month period began. They mark the beginning of a new reality in the relations between countries in the region. Ethiopia and Eritrea have shown that reconciliation is possible, and that it produces many more benefits between neighbouring countries than confrontation does. They have reached significant agreements resolving a long-standing issue between their States, thereby defusing one of the most chronic and protracted conflicts in Africa.

Somalia and Eritrea have re-established diplomatic ties after a long period of rupture, which is a very significant step forward in their efforts to resolve their differences. The normalization of relations between Djibouti and Eritrea began when the Foreign Ministers of Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea travelled to Djibouti, a commitment that was subsequently confirmed in a meeting between the Presidents of Eritrea and Djibouti in Saudi Arabia in September. We realize that the region must be able to optimize its undeniable potential, and it is therefore important that the countries of the region unite their efforts to avoid their common threats, particularly Al-Shabaab. We ask that outstanding issues such as those pertaining to prisoners of war and border matters be tackled in the positive spirit of today's resolution, and here we are specifically referring to Eritrea and Djibouti.

In conclusion, peaceful, brotherly coexistence between States is a crucial factor that must prevail in the international political arena. It is vital to guaranteeing the peaceful coexistence in the region that all countries should foster with a view to ensuring their States' successful development. That is the new dynamic that the countries of the Horn of Africa have decided to embrace under the leadership of Ethiopia and its Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, and that is the spirit of the resolution we have just adopted.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to express its gratitude for the work of the delegation of the United Kingdom in drafting of resolution 2444 (2018), which we just adopted unanimously. We also welcome the representatives of Djibouti, Eritrea and Somalia to this very important Security Council meeting.

Bolivia has been closely following the development of the events in the Horn of Africa. We reiterate our appreciation of the new approach of understanding and liaising undertaken by the countries of the subregion, which is beginning a renewed phase of peace and friendship that we are confident will promote cooperation in fundamental areas such as the economy, social and cultural affairs and, of course, security. In this regard, we believe that the progress made to date in the region must be reflected through commitments to confidence-building measures among States. We also believe that the important developments occurring in the Horn of Africa highlight the importance of leadership and the primacy of policy, as well as the need for dialogue and the support of the international community.

My delegation has reiterated on many occasions that sanctions are not an end in themselves. The Charter of the United Nations sanctions should be assessed in the light of the evolving situation and the context on the ground. This was a special case in which the necessity of lifting sanctions was, of course, imperative.

With regard to the situation in Somalia, my delegation also categorically condemns the recent terrorist attack that took place in Mogadishu. We express our concern about the risks that come with the continued presence of Al-Shabaab in Somalia and in the subregion, in addition to the threat posed by the presence of factions of Da'esh, the use of sophisticated techniques and asymmetric attacks. In that regard, we believe that the Council and the international community in general must continue to support an inclusive political process of peace and reconciliation that is guided and owned by the Somali people themselves.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We also wish to express our appreciation for the unanimous adoption of resolution 2444 (2018) lifting the sanctions against Eritrea, which bears witness to the positive progress being made towards establishing a dialogue between Eritrea and its neighbours and the general easing of tensions in the Horn of Africa region as a whole. However, we wish to underline that it is important to resolve such pending issues as those concerning the disappeared soldiers and the border between Djibouti and Eritrea. The role of Ethiopia in all of the positive developments in the region must be highlighted and acknowledged by the Council.

There are still major challenges that exist, such as Al-Shabaab's terrorism in Somalia and the need to make swift progress in the development of the region and in improving the living standards of its populations. Therefore, it was very important for the Council and the international community in general to recognize and adopt decisions that will encourage the

region to continue on the path towards achieving peace, reconciliation and development.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): First and foremost, I would like to express our sincere condolences to the Government and people of the brotherly nation of Somalia with respect to the victims of the terrorist attacks in Mogadishu last Friday.

The States in the Horn of Africa have seen significant positive political developments in recent times. That enabled the Governments and the peoples of the region to override their differences and to turn a page in the painful history of many generations. That has generated hope to achieving security and stability to which the region aspires. We commend the efforts made by the leaders of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti which led to a historic achievement at the Horn of Africa summit with the signing of the Jeddah Agreement on Peace, Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation.

We welcome today's adoption of resolution 2444 (2018) for which Kuwait voted in favour. That came out of Kuwait's established and firm position to achieve a just and lasting peace by peaceful means. We believe in taking the opportunity of the historic reconciliation in the Horn of Africa region in order to achieve the desired peace. We also hope to reach a consensual formula which leads to the best interests of the peoples in the region and takes into consideration the rights of the States that they belong to.

Based on that, Kuwait supported the decision of the Security Council to lift sanctions against Eritrea in order to let it play a fruitful role in establishing stability in the region along with its neighbours, and especially in resolving its pending differences with Djibouti. In that regard, we look forward to achieving tangible developments by 15 February 2019, the date of submitting the next report of the Secretary-General on this matter.

We should not forget also to lift the sanctions against Somalia, which is one of the main objectives of our joint efforts in order to help and support that country to confront the challenges it is facing. On top of those challenges is the serious threat posed by Al-Shabaab.

Sanctions are an important tool in the hands of the Security Council. Lifting the sanctions represents a message sent to the international community that they are not imposed for ever. They are not a tool to punish States and peoples. The message also is that the Council responds to positive developments and lifts the sanctions when the reasons for which they were imposed do not exist anymore. In such cases, there would be no justification for the Security Council which maintains international peace and security, pursuant to the Charter, to keep the sanctions imposed.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the delegation of the United Kingdom which is the penholder for its transparent work during the negotiations.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

First of all, China condemns the terrorist attack that occurred last Friday. We express our condolences and sympathy over the deaths and casualties resulting from the attack.

This morning, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2444 (2018), lifting the sanctions on Eritrea and extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 751 (1992). In the past few months, we have witnessed positive changes in the situation in the Horn of Africa and a continued improvement of relations among the countries of the region. The Council's lifting of sanctions on Eritrea is conducive to the efforts of the countries of the region to achieve peace and development and to maintain the current positive development momentum in the region, which China welcomes.

Meanwhile, the Horn of Africa still faces challenges. The Council and, indeed, the international community should continue to provide constructive assistance in the light of the needs of the countries in the region. We hope that the countries concerned in the region will actively take the current favourable opportunity to increase dialogue and consultations and meet each other halfway to properly solve the issues. I hope that the international community will continue to help the Somali Government focus on the threat of Al-Shabaab and make progress in Somalia's national reconciliation process. China is ready to continue to work with the international community in playing a constructive role in the attainment of peace, stability and development in the countries of the Horn of Africa.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Somalia.

Mr. Osman (Somalia): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. We are confident in your leadership and wish you every success in fulfilling your duties. I would also like to commend your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, for his excellent leadership in guiding the work of the Council last month.

We warmly congratulate the people of Eritrea for withstanding the hardship endured under the sanctions regime. We welcome the lifting of the sanctions on Eritrea, while acknowledging the efforts spearheaded by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo with regard to the normalization of the relationship between Eritrea and Djibouti. We hope that the two Governments will engage in good faith to settle all outstanding issues in accordance with international law.

Forty-six years ago, my country, Somalia, and its leaders were uncompromising in their hard work to achieve sustainable peace, particularly in Africa. My country successfully promoted and ensured the peace negotiations during the crisis between Tanzania and Uganda.

That having been said, the Federal Government of Somalia looks forward to the beginning of a new chapter of cooperation and partnership with all the countries in the Horn of Africa. Together we will strengthen the ties that have been forged among the peoples of the region. Since 1992, the Federal Government of Somalia has been publicly seeking the lifting of sanctions imposed on our country. Accordingly, I would like to raise the following points.

First, the outdated sanctions against Somalia constitute one of the longest-standing United Nations sanctions regimes ever imposed and one with the broadest mandate as well. Not only did the sanctions violate Somalia's national unity, but it also thwarted the Federal Government's policy goal of building a standing Somali national army. For example, sub-paragraph (a) of paragraph 11 and sub-paragraph (c) of paragraph 10 of the sanctions regime allow countries to provide weapons and ammunition to Somali regional authorities without the Federal Government being notified, thereby circumventing our approval of these weapons transfers and impeding the management of end users of such weapons and ammunition.

Despite our belief that sanctions are flawed in principle, they continued to be imposed on Somalia without proper assessment of their effectiveness for the attainment of the Council's desired end goal. We once again stress the importance of having clearly defined benchmarks to monitor the complete lifting of sanctions on Somalia. If no specific, clear and verifiable steps are set forth, the incentives to comply with Council's demands will be undercut and the effectiveness of the ending the sanctions regime will drastically diminish.

Secondly, terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant remain a serious threat to Somalia's peace and stability. A year ago, on 14 October 2017, we witnessed one of the largest and deadliest attack ever to take place in Somalia. Yet, sadly, the Somali people are receiving messages of condolences and sympathy anew from our friends and partners, following the deadly attack on Mogadishu on 9 November, which claimed the lives of more than 50 people and injured more than 100. We believe that Security Council sanctions should target such terrorist groups as Al-Shabaab, which continue to receive weapons and resources from abroad. In its report, the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea concluded that, with regard to the 14 October attack,

> "While there is no evidence to suggest that the ... improvised explosive device contained home-made explosives, constructing a 1,200 kg bomb by traditional harvesting of explosive remnants of war would entail a major logistical operation; for example, Al-Shabaab would have had to harvest approximately 6,000 60-mm mortars or 190 TM-57 anti-tank mines" (*S/2018/1002, para. 74*).

Terrorists groups like Al-Shabaab do not go through the official import channels. Consequently, our fight against terrorism is all the more challenging since large quantities of weapons and resources continue to flow into Somalia despite the embargo. Terrorist groups in Somalia have made use of the existing trade networks and the short distance to Somalia from across the Gulf of Aden. The impact on Somalia of the war in Yemen has been particularly acute, since we are incapable of securing remote areas along our coastline and borders. The flow of illegal weapons and resources into the country can only be curbed by targeting and destroying the networks that provide them. We ask our partners to help us improve our capacity in air surveillance, borders, customs, and law enforcement to control land

borders and other sea and air access points. It is the responsibility of the Federal Government of Somalia to monitor and safeguard its borders.

Thirdly, the construction of the military base in Berbera clearly defies Council resolutions, and serves to undermine Somalia's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Two years in a row, the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea has noted that the establishment of the military base in Berbera is a clear violation of the arms embargo imposed on Somalia. However, the foreign base continues to be built, with a reported completion date of 2019, and military equipment continues to be transferred. We ask Council members what the purpose of a sanctions regime is if violations of that regime by Member States are ignored by the Security Council. We wonder what the value of Council resolutions is if Somalia's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity are continually and openly violated. Over the last quarter century, the Council has issued a large number of statements on the issue, but that it is time now to back up those words with appropriate action pursuant to its primary responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security.

Fourthly, subject-matter expertise and evidence-based reporting are the best practices to be used in the monitoring of a United Nations arms embargo. However, those practices seem not to be worthy of consideration today. Since the adoption of its mandate, the Monitoring Group, unlike most Panels of Experts on sanctions, which are present on the ground in the countries they monitor, has been based in Nairobi, Kenya, far from Somalia. As a result, the Group devotes only 20 per cent of its time to being present in Somalia to monitor, analyse and investigate events in the country. Although the number of experts makes the Somalia group one of the largest United Nations sanctions regimes, the quality of its reports has been mixed owing to the Group's minimal time spent on site, as well as to the questionable level of technical and regional expertise.

Furthermore, the Monitoring Group identifies those working for reform as the primary targets of the investigation. False accusations, claims based on weak evidence, gossip and political grievances have all been used to undermine Somali efforts. The Federal Government of Somalia will not tolerate Somali individuals, institutions and organizations being named in the report with little or no evidence to back up the reports' assertions. Many individuals and entities trying to invest in and rebuild Somalia have seen their reputations irresponsibly damaged or at least called into question before the international community based solely on rumour and speculation.

Accordingly, we welcome the name change of the Panel of Experts. We also recommend that the Panel be relocated to better perform its mandated tasks. Moreover, we recommend drawing experts from a pool of individuals with a higher level of technical and regional expertise than previously when the Panel undertakes future investigations in Somalia.

In conclusion, we thank the Security Council for its continued support of Somalia's unity and progress. Terrorism is not only a Somali fight; it is also a regional and a global fight, in which we are all united so as to be able to counter its ever-changing threat. We encourage the Council to look beyond the borders of Somalia and support us in our regional approach to the threats we are facing. That is the only way that we can comprehensively defeat terrorism and build a lasting peace in Somalia and throughout the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mr. Doualeh (Djibouti): At the outset, Djibouti wishes to express is profound gratitude to the members of the Security Council for the opportunity to offer its views on the unresolved border dispute with Eritrea and the remaining 13 prisoners of war still unaccounted for. It further wishes to thank Mr. Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia, and lauds his efforts to continue with faith and perseverance in the execution of his mandate. We of course commend Ambassador Karen Pierce of the United Kingdom and her team for all the efforts they have made in the process leading to the drafting of resolution 2444 (2018) adopted today. Most importantly, Djibouti expresses its gratitude to the members of the Council for their unanimous support of its legitimate security concerns, aspirations and goals.

First, on Somalia, Djibouti is heartened by the progress made in the implementation of the political road map, the national security architecture and the transition plan, and supports the call for the acceleration of these efforts. Djibouti welcomes the adoption of resolution 2431 (2018), extending the mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) until May 2019. AMISOM's continued enabling role and

support is vital to the implementation of the transition plan and the strengthening of the capacities of the Somali security forces.

However, it notes with the utmost concern that Al-Shabaab remains a threat to peace and security in Somalia, as evidenced by the latest terrorist attack in Mogadishu, in which dozens of innocent men, women and children were killed or injured. Al-Shabaab routinely commits brazen terrorist attacks at home and abroad and carries out targeted political assassinations. It is therefore urgent to accelerate efforts to implement the national security architecture, and we should collectively mount, in earnest, a meaningful effort to weaken and defeat Al-Shabaab.

Djibouti remains committed to peace in Somalia and will continue to contribute in any way it can. In that regard, I wish to inform the members of the Security Council that the African Union Peace and Security Council, currently chaired by Djibouti, will be conducting a field visit in Somalia on 27 and 28 November. The Council will have an opportunity to gather information at first-hand and conduct an in-depth analysis of the security situation in the country. It will therefore be in a position to articulate practical action-oriented recommendations on the way forward.

On Eritrea, Djibouti welcomes the lifting of arms embargoes, travel bans, assets freezes and targeted sanctions on the country. As the Council is aware, Djibouti's paramount interest is to secure a peaceful, permanent resolution of all boundary and territorial differences, in accordance with international law. Those differences, which arose in 2008 and led to an armed conflict that year, have remained unresolved and constitute a threat to Djibouti itself and to international peace and security. Direct negotiations and mediation by third parties have been attempted, but have failed to make significant progress towards a settlement.

Djibouti has called upon the Council, with the assistance of the Secretary-General, to facilitate an agreement of the parties to voluntarily submit their boundary and territorial differences for full and final settlement by an impartial third party, such as an international arbitration tribunal or the International Court of Justice, in accordance with Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations. What Djibouti seeks are impartial, forward-looking measures that assist the parties in settling their prolonged conflict by recommending a specific means of settlement from among those identified in Article 33 and establishing a mechanism leading to agreement on those means.

In that regard, Djibouti reiterates its gratitude to the members of the Council for the unanimous support for resolution 2444 (2018), just adopted. It underlines the importance of continuing efforts aimed at normalizing relations between Eritrea and Djibouti for regional peace, stability and reconciliation; the settlement of disputes in a peaceful manner, consistent with international law; and support for the good-faith resolution of these matters.

As noted in paragraph 3 of the resolution, the Presidents of Djibouti and Eritrea met in Jeddah on 17 September and agreed to continue efforts aimed at the normalization of relations between the two countries. Djibouti is committed to deepening dialogue and negotiating in good faith with Eritrea until an amicable resolution is achieved on all outstanding issues. Continued stalemate is not an option; we need to expedite the process. In that regard, we welcome paragraph 57 of the resolution, which underscores the importance of the Council's continued engagement, guidance and oversight. Djibouti is committed to working with Eritrea until the parties reach a full and final agreement on the international land boundary, the sovereignty of Doumeira Island, the maritime boundary and the status of the prisoners of war.

On the prisoners of war, 13 prisoners, who remain unaccounted for, are still in Eritrean custody. As we have stated before in the Chamber, the release of our remaining prisoners of war from the cruelty of their captivity has been uppermost in our thoughts. We will engage meaningfully with Eritrea to clarify the fate of the remaining prisoners of war and will work tirelessly to ensure their prompt repatriation. We express hope that, after nine years of stonewalling about them, Eritrea is at last willing to comply with Council decisions and will engage in good faith on the issue of the Djiboutian combatants missing in action, as called for in paragraph 6 of resolution 2444 (2018). The Government of Djibouti has authorized the High Commissioner for Refugees to review all of the individual histories of Eritrean prisoners of war held in Djibouti since the clashes of 2008 and to make recommendations with respect to their status and need for protection.

Finally, Djibouti welcomes the reporting mechanism, as provided for in paragraph 57. We are looking forward to the report of the Secretary-General

to be presented to the Council no later than 15 February 2019. Indeed, progress can be made, and it can be made swiftly, if there is commitment to the process by the disputing States.

(*spoke in French*)

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm the readiness of Djibouti to contribute to strengthening good-neighbourly relations among the countries of the region. We must do all we can to ensure that the metaphor that we often use to describe the current dynamic in the region — the "wind of peace that blows in the Horn of Africa" — is not a mere cliché and an empty slogan or, at best, a catchphrase without any concrete, tangible basis in reality. Peace in the region must be total, inclusive and must generate a transformative force that, we hope, will enable the countries in the Horn of Africa to reach their economic potential for the sake of the peoples living there.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Eritrea.

Mr. Giorgio (Eritrea): I wish to congratulate China on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of November.

For the past nine years in its appeals before the Council, the delegation of Eritrea has sought an end to the unwarranted punitive measures imposed on the people of Eritrea. The long-overdue call for justice has finally been answered through the Council's unanimous decision to adopt resolution 2444 (2018).

The lifting of the sanctions will mark an end to a difficult period for Eritrea and the region. The actions and inactions of the Council have had harmful consequences for the people of Eritrea and the Horn of Africa, resulting in two decades of missed opportunities for peace and socioeconomic progress.

On this historic day, I humbly congratulate the people of Eritrea, who have endured persistent external pressure designed to taint their heroic history and thwart their vision for durable peace and economic progress in the Horn of Africa. Eritreans will not look backwards and are not resentful. While mindful of the historical lessons of the past two decades, they are determined to create a peaceful and prosperous nation that is worthy of the sacrifice made for over seven decades to build a harmonious, peaceful and confident country.

Eritreans are extremely pleased to have witnessed the recent positive regional developments. Eritrea as a nation is committed to working with all its neighbours, including Djibouti, to consolidate the gains made since the historic rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the Agreement on Peace, Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the tripartite agreement of cooperation between Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, which mark the beginning of a new dawn. Eritrea would like to take this opportunity to thank Ethiopia and Somalia, which have called for the immediate lifting of the sanctions, for their courageous position.

While proud of the region's capability to resolve intransigent conflicts at an unprecedented speed, we are not complacent. Eritrea recognizes that a more difficult and complex task lies ahead. The country is determined to redouble its efforts and work closely with its neighbours to build a region at peace with itself that fulfils the desires and aspirations of every woman, man and child for a dignified life.

Eritrea welcomes the good wishes and the encouragement of the international community and applauds its willingness to show support for this new era. However, more than good intentions, the region needs an understanding approach on the part of the international community and the freedom to chart its own policies and future based on the shared history, culture and interests of the people of the region.

In conclusion, I thank all those who have advocated and supported the lifting of the sanctions against the people of Eritrea. I would also like to thank Kazakhstan, as Chair, and the United Kingdom, as penholder, for the constructive engagement they have had with my delegation.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8399

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8399th meeting

Wednesday, 14 November 2018, 11.15 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Vaverka
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2018/981)

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18-37781 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2018/981)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Serbia to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Vlora Çitaku to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/981, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

I now give the floor to Mr. Tanin.

Mr. Tanin: The members of the Security Council have before them the latest quarterly report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/981), and today I will share with them my assessment of the situation, as well as an overview of the recalibrated work priorities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

When I last briefed the Council in May (see S/PV.8254), the situation reflected a degree of uncertainty with regard to the prospects for decisive progress in the European Union (EU)-facilitated political dialogue. However, after leaders from Belgrade and Pristina met in June and July, prospects for renewed negotiations began to be explored. At the European Forum Alpbach in Austria in August, both sides advocated for a new framework for a comprehensive agreement, including the possibility of territorial exchange. The addition of that new dimension has generated new impetus, as well as apprehension, among political actors and the populations on both sides, as well as within the region and among the international community. Regardless of the underlying challenges and concerns, the discussion has opened space for debate and consideration. Last week in Brussels, President Vučić and President Thaçi met and confirmed their mutual intention to continue the dialogue and work towards a settlement, within the EU-facilitated process.

The political talks in Brussels took place against a situation still dominated by frequent adversarial actions on the ground, many of which carry real consequences for the populations. Actions that attempt to pre-empt agreement are not conducive to achieving political compromise. Whether on larger or smaller issues, one-sided actions carry the constant potential of influencing the situation on the ground.

I refer to a number of broad areas, including infrastructure, energy and the economy. Individuals continue to face challenges in exercising their basic rights, including the rights of freedom of movement, religious practice and equal access to economic opportunities. In a recent development, the announcement by the Kosovo Government that a 10 per cent tax would be imposed on Serbian and Bosnian goods further increased tensions between Pristina and Belgrade and created instability for business and people. The Government of Serbia denounced the measure as damaging to the normalization of relations and a violation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement.

I would like to underline that the much-needed reform of Kosovo's rule-of-law institutions has been undermined by ethnic tension and political agendas. The resignation of a Kosovo Special Prosecutor over alleged threats connected to the investigation of major cases led to public protests and harmed public confidence in the strength and impartiality of the justice system. Naturally, protecting the independence of the judiciary and fighting organized crime and corruption require continuous and strenuous effort, in Kosovo as well as everywhere else. The European Union and the United Nations continue to place resources at the disposal of the authorities to help in that difficult but essential endeavour.

The wider context of the political dialogue process between the parties may sometimes be overshadowed by this array of unresolved problems, posturing and jousting. The European perspective itself continues to provide a significant source of motivation for political leaders on both sides and, in doing so, helps promote continued peace and stability. Support and assistance from the European Union is essential to strengthen capacity across Kosovo's public institutions and, on 19 July, the European Commission took a momentous step in affirming that benchmarks had been met for Kosovo's road map on visa liberalization, proposing that the European Parliament and the European Council lift visa requirements and allow visa-free travel for residents of Kosovo.

With all the focus on possibilities for a new political compromise, let me underline that we should not fail to account for the advances made since April 2013 and the central tenets of the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations signed at that time, including the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities. Those tenets and their full implementation are crucial to progress on the ground.

The Assembly of Kosovo's recent approval of three draft laws on the Kosovo Security Force, aimed at significantly enhance the strength and responsibilities of the Force, has caused renewed tensions. The matter needs to be handled with the utmost care to ensure that the steps taken are the result of a fully inclusive, fully representative political process that respects the relevant legal frameworks.

Any political negotiation process, if it is to succeed, requires the full engagement and buy-in of societies, as well as leaders and political representatives. Top-level commitments that may be reached via political negotiations, no matter the strength of international and regional support, are unlikely to stand unless they are backed by full understanding and confidence among communities and individuals across society. I am confident that leaders on both sides, as well as the facilitators of the dialogue, have that firmly in mind.

With that in mind, UNMIK continues to prioritize *trust-building in Kosovo, particularly at the grass-*roots level, whenever and wherever possible, in close cooperation with all international partners on the ground. I have set engagement, empowerment and creativity as core objectives of our interaction and work with Kosovo society.

As I previously highlighted to the Council, UNMIK has re-aligned its focus and priorities towards promoting longer-term reconciliation at multiple levels in Kosovo. Without societal reconciliation — involving people, communities and civil society — progress can falter, regardless of the best efforts and work of political stakeholders. Trust-building requires patience and persistence to raise and empower the voices of understanding and compassion that may help shape a future different from divisions and conflict.

Following the United Nations Kosovo Trust-Building Forum held in Ljubljana in May, we have worked systematically to identify, support and empower change-makers across Kosovo and facilitate the implementation of initiatives outlined by participants in the Forum. In collaboration with the United Nations Kosovo team and other international partners, UNMIK is focused on realizing the recommendations from the Trust-Building Forum, which include a number of concrete measures for this year and beyond. The action plan encompasses a series of important measures, ranging from involving all segments of Kosovo society in an informed debate about the future to influencing the agendas of local and international partners in the areas of intercommunity trust and cooperation.

Other key objectives of the Mission's ongoing work include promoting the use of innovative communication technologies to support constant interaction among all groups and communities across Kosovo and addressing outstanding issues within the framework of justice, human rights, the women and peace and security agenda and the youth, peace and security agenda. I would like to emphasise that the UNMIK strategic frameworks on women and youth represent a bold step towards supporting the empowerment of women and young people in Kosovo.

Those efforts are designed to encourage an environment conducive to peace and reconciliation, healing historical mistrust and building bridges of common interest among communities. That is fully in line with the Secretary-General's Action for *Peacekeeping initiative and may offer an important* example of how to tap into the potential of people and partnerships to create the necessary conditions for sustaining peace.

Our international partnerships remain vital in this effort. During the year, the Mission reinforced its functional collaboration with the EU Office, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Kosovo Force, the Council of Europe and other international presences, together with our core partners in the United Nations Kosovo team. Besides any regular consultations in Belgrade, Pristina and regional capitals, I have made particular efforts to share our perspective and experience with stakeholders in Europe and beyond.

In each of the areas of the Mission's recalibrated work, as I have described today, UNMIK is working in line with the core principles of the Secretary-General's reform agenda and the guidance of the Council. Our efforts are aimed at helping to boost the conditions for peaceful negotiation and societal reconciliation.

At the same time, we are working to remain at the forefront of understanding, help the Council and share our understanding and work with all partners in the service of a lasting peace. I thank the members of the Council for their continuing support.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Tanin for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Dačić.

Mr. Dačić (Serbia) (*spoke in Serbian; interpretation provided by the delegation*): At the outset, I thank Secretary-General Guterres for his report (S/2018/981) and his Special Representative, Mr. Tanin, for his briefing. I also thank them for their dedication and hard work on the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), under resolution 1244 (1999). I commend China for including this meeting, in line with the established dynamic, on the agenda of the Security Council, as well as the Council members who support a continued consideration of this question.

In August, we did not have the regular meeting on UNMIK, and I cannot but express my displeasure at the decision of the United Kingdom not to include that item in the programme of work of the Security Council, with the explanation that the situation in Kosovo and Metohija was calm and nothing was happening on the ground. I take this opportunity to point out why that approach is wrong and why we consider that it is important at this moment that this topic remain high on the Council's agenda.

We spent more than three hours — the time it usually takes to hold a Security Council meeting — discussing if it was necessary to convene the meeting or not. An unnecessary adversarial atmosphere between Belgrade and Pristina was created, as was division among Security Council members. The adoption of the programme of work of the Security Council was called into question, which constitutes a situation that is certainly harmful for both the solution of that issue and the prevailing tone in this organ.

Membership of the Security Council, let me recall, is a great privilege and a great responsibility, and its members must do their best to safeguard international peace and security. For years, the United Nations and its Member States have spared no effort or time working to prevent conflicts, and we are all called upon to do what it takes to prevent, at the first sign, instability from metamorphosing into a conflict.

In this case, we are faced with a situation of a semi-resolved problem being neglected. The conflict is far behind us, but we are equally far from establishing a stable and safe situation that no longer merits the attention of this organ. To allege that this topic is less important at a time when extensive efforts are being made to find a durable and sustainable solution, with great support from important actors in the international community, is counterproductive, to say the least.

We continue to believe that agreement should be reached among Council members on how often this topic should be considered in the Security Council and that the question of frequency is not a technical matter. I recall that Serbia tried hard to make a contribution to achieving a solution by agreement, and we are ready to continue the discussion of that question with all interested parties in the same constructive spirit.

It is with regret that I note that no substantive, positive changes have taken place since the last meeting of the Security Council on this item (see S/PV.8254). More than 2,000 days have passed without the formation of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, which is the cornerstone of the Brussels Agreement; no conditions have been created for the return of 200,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs); the Specialist Chambers have not begun their work and almost a year has passed since the murder of Oliver Ivanović, while the perpetrator of that heinous

crime has not been found. None of that has happened, and one would be hard-pressed to say that what has been done has been positive. Resolutions of this organ have been grossly violated and new provocations and new incidents have occurred. Let me mention just a few.

The so-called Kosovo Assembly has adopted laws that will make it possible, for all practical purposes, for the Kosovo Security Force to transform into armed forces. The constant calls of the international community for caution and disregard for the interests of the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija notwithstanding, the authorities in Pristina are resolved to form the armed forces. Serbia is categorically opposed to such unilateral acts, for it is evident that those forces would have all the attributes and competencies of a military, irrespective of what they might be named.

Let me recall that, under resolution 1244 (1999) and the Military Technical Agreement, the Kosovo Force (KFOR) is the only legal military formation in Kosovo and Metohija. At the same time, it is an important guarantor of the implementation of the Brussels Agreement and, in practical terms, the only guarantor of the security and survival of the Serbs, their property and their religious and cultural heritage. Let me point out that it is unacceptable that radical, far-reaching and unilateral decisions be taken at a time when of ongoing dialogue aimed at finding a solution, and I expect the Security Council members to condemn Pristina's decision in that regard.

During his visit to Kosovo and Metohija on 8 and 9 September, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić was prevented from visiting the locality of Banja, in a Serbian enclave, because the Pristina authorities changed their initial decision at the last moment, regardless of his clear message of peace and calls for a sustainable solution for Kosovo and Metohija.

The raid by the special police forces of Gazivode reservoir was the most drastic example of provocation. Sixty members of the special Regional Operational Support Unit units, wearing balaclavas and wielding long-barrel guns, descended on Gazivode reservoir and hydroelectric plant in northern Kosovo and Metohija to enable Hashim Thaçi to make a visit. I am afraid that the only goal of that irrational action was to provoke and intimidate the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija, and not for the first time. That too, let me point out, was a clear violation of resolution 1244 (1999) and the Brussels Agreement.

As the First Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, I personally attended, along with Catherine Ashton, Hashim Thaçi and Aleksandar Vučić, a NATO meeting at the time of the signing of the Brussels Agreement in 2013, at which agreement was reached that no Kosovo security force could go to the north, unless two conditions were met: first, advice given to KFOR; and secondly, consent given by representatives of the Serbian municipalities in northern Kosovo and Metohija. Neither of those two occurred. We consider the KFOR and European Union (EU) reactions to have been inadequate and, to say the least, incongruent with their role and mandate. Escalation was avoided thanks to the calm prevailing on our side, the messages of the President of Serbia and the restraint of the Serbs in northern Kosovo and Metohija, who, although alarmed, demonstrated maturity and did not take the bait of provocation.

The message sent by the Gazivoda incident, however, is of particular concern. The reservoir and the hydroelectric plant are strategically important for both us and the Pristina side, yet Pristina is not ready to discuss substantive issues. The recent attempt to interfere with the work of Elektromreža Srbije, Serbia's power transmission network, and the intention of Pristina to take over the energy infrastructure in northern Kosovo and Metohija are also indicative in that regard. I recall that energy is a subject matter of the Brussels dialogue and that we have expressed our concern on a number of occasions over the steps Pristina has taken that threaten the energy stability of the entire region, despite its failure to fulfil its obligation to register two energy companies in northern Kosovo and Metohija.

Allow me to say that, according to the Brussels Agreement, the formation of the association/community of Serb-majority is important. What kind of dialogue are we talking about if, 2,000 days after the signing of the Brussels Agreement and the commitments to the European Union contained therein were undertaken by Pristina, none has been fulfilled, including the formation of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities? That association, of course, should be the basis for the formation of the aforementioned energy companies and for further discussion of the topic of energy.

Other developments also took place within the two previous reporting periods. The Pristina authorities decided to build a road through the special protected zone of the Visoki Dečani monastery, built in the

fourteenth century and included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, and sent bulldozers to its courtyard. Someone wrote "HH" on the gates of the monastery. That is the kind of conditions that the cultural heritage of Serbs must endure in Kosovo and Metohija. I take this opportunity to thank international representatives who prevented such unfortunate action by their timely intervention.

Attacks on Serbs and their property have occurred once again, including against those en route to the graveyards of their relatives, as well as against children in a playground. Unlike the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/961), that of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Mission in Kosovo registers 173 incidents involving members of non-Albanian communities from January to June alone, and says that the overall number of incidents rose by almost 20 per cent compared to the previous six months.

These are only some of the incidents that threaten security in Kosovo and Metohija and burden its already complex situation. I have to admit that I do not understand how this situation can be characterized as stable by anybody. Perhaps a "stable situation" implies that Serbs are fair game, that attacks on them are normal, that they do and will occur, and that they do not merit attention or response.

I would remind Council members that many of these attacks are directed at IDPs and returnees. How are we to expect even a modicum of progress to take place in the process of IDP returns if, in the Europe of the twenty-first century, we continue to recognize that the security situation is still the biggest challenge as the returnees continue to be targets of ethnically motivated attacks? Arbitrary arrests — that is, arrests of returnees on trumped-up charges — physical assaults and injuries, the stoning of the faithful and assaults on priests, the destruction of property, disturbing graffiti, the desecration of memorial plaques, national and religious hatred, the destruction of graveyards, provocations, institutional discrimination, the absence of the rule of law and an independent judiciary, drawn-out procedures, inadequate protection of evidence and witnesses, failure to enforce court decisions and other injustices are among the obstacles encountered these days by those attempting to return home. The latest report of the Secretary-General fails to refer to the approximately 200,000 IDPs who — according to a report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — have waited 19 years but still do not enjoy their rights because of these unacceptable practices.

The assertions regarding stability are most certainly undercut as well by the number of foreign terrorist fighters from Kosovo, concerning which the Secretary-General also expresses concern in his report. Reports that one group planned to carry out terrorist attacks in Serbian majority communities and on KFOR are particularly alarming.

Another important and sensitive topic is the question of sexual violence in conflict. Serbia condemns most strongly such horrific acts of violence and believes that all perpetrators must be punished and that victims should be provided with appropriate protection and help. The number of victims of sexual violence in conflict does not diminish the dreadful effect of such violence on each individual victim, just as speculation about numbers does not help justice, leads to politicization and slows down the process of reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

The information contained in the report and based on the data of the Commission for the Verification and Recognition of Sexual Violence Victim Status in Kosovo — according to which, out of 782 complaints, only 137 have been accepted — is indicative of the years-long practice by Pristina of presenting falsehoods to the Security Council and continually invoking the World Health Organization (WHO), even though that agency does not possess any such data. I have submitted requests to the WHO, which has confirmed that it does not have any such information. At these meetings of the Council, we have heard repeated allegations of the existence of 20,000 victims of sexual violence, on the basis of which attempts have been made to establish a hierarchy of victims based on ethnic, religious or other attachments. It is almost as if Serbian victims were less important and that sexual violence against Serbian nationals were justified and unpunishable.

In this atmosphere of the justification of crimes against Serbs, it was possible for the so-called Government of Kosovo to nominate Fatmir Limaj as chief of the negotiating team in the dialogue with Belgrade. As a commander in the Kosovo Liberation Army, he raped and killed, according to the testimony of Albanians themselves, the Mazreku brothers, witnesses and accomplices to the crime, and a number of Serbian women in the village of Klecka. That is the man dispatched as head of the team to negotiate with Serbia.

I reiterate that Serbia believes that these issues must be addressed without politicization and with respect for each and every victim, and of course with recourse to the truth and the facts concerning all parties to the war.

On this occasion, I cannot fail to mention the letter addressed to the Secretary-General by the departing United States Ambassador to the United Nations, urging him to initiate a strategic review of UNMIK and to develop an exit strategy from Kosovo. We have heard again and again at these meetings that UNMIK has fulfilled its mandate and that it is no longer needed, in light of the fact that the so-called Kosovo has built democratic institutions and that the rule of law and human rights are being respected. I must once again put the following questions to all those who have made these arguments.

Do they accept that democratic institutions do not carry out the agreements and obligations they have undertaken? The Brussels agreement was signed but has not been implemented by Pristina. Do they believe that democracy is served when tear-gas grenades are lobbed in Parliament, as we have seen occur in Pristina for years now? Is it evidence of the rule of law when, every now and then, Pristina pardons criminals sentenced for the most heinous criminal offences, including members of the Drenica Group? Can the intimidation of returnees, attacks on members of minority communities and daily discrimination against them be accepted as a normal state of affairs? Has the desired standard of respect for human rights been achieved by the return of a mere 1.9 per cent of IDPs? Is that a sufficient number to warrant giving up on further returns? Does that mean that the expulsion of 200,000 Serbs is done and dusted? Are we supposed not to mention it any more? Whatever happened to over 1,500 missing Serbs? We keep hearing such insinuations from other parties, as if Serbian victims were less important.

For some, this is an uncomfortable yet undeniable truth. Almost everyone sitting at this table supports the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the general situation cannot be compared to that of Kosovo and Metohija and where we can all agree that the security of citizens is not threatened. Why is the international presence needed in Bosnia and Herzegovina but not in Kosovo and Metohija? Why have some Council members not raised the issue of removing the international presence from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as they have with respect to Kosovo? I can agree that the situation in Kosovo is significantly different than it was in 1999 or 2009, but the Mission is also different from what it was at that time. To allege, however, that the Mission is not needed and that it has fulfilled its purpose is far from reality. Considering that this organ is responsible for the UNMIK mandate, I would like to ask on this occasion whether and what the Secretary-General replied to Ambassador Haley.

Some Council members are of the view that the status of Kosovo is a finished story; at the same time, many think that it is not. Many States are now reconsidering their decision to recognize the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo and, to date, 10 States have changed that decision. They have revoked their recognition or suspended it. They realized that they had not been sufficiently informed of the situation and thought that it was necessary to give dialogue a chance and that everyone would respect the outcome of the dialogue. That number could soon rise significantly and the number of those that have recognized the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo could fall below one half of the United Nations membership. Decisions to withdraw such recognition are condemned by Pristina and some States, while Serbia's petitions are disqualified as provocations. Conversely, for such States Pristina's lobbying for new recognitions is a legitimate exercise, not a provocation. For them, calls to disrespect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a full-fledged State Member of the United Nations heard from some countries — and which I am sure we will hear at today's meeting, since they always do so in my presence — will openly appeal to other countries to recognize Kosovo. What does that mean? They can lobby countries to recognize Kosovo, whereas Serbia may not call on countries to withdraw such recognition. It seems that something is very wrong in that reasoning.

In desperation, last week Pristina increased its tariffs on goods from Serbia by 10 per cent to punish my country for how it was conducting its foreign policy. It did so in breach of the rules and regulations of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), which it currently chairs, and had such an action strongly condemned by all international actors, including the European Union. Serbia agreed for Kosovo to take part in the regional initiative. Serbia was asked to do so, and it did so, and now Kosovo is not respecting CEFTA, which it chairs. It is interesting that even Hashim Thaçi himself disagrees with that decision of the Pristina

authorities. The policy is therefore not clear to me. We have good and bad policemen in Kosovo.

Instead on dialogue, Pristina is focusing on attempts to become a member of international organizations in the mistaken belief that it will thereby prove its statehood, refusing to accept that such attempts are disruptive to any solution whatsoever. However, the lack of grounds for its applications and their inconsistency with the basic principles of international law are conducive to the politicization of those organizations, their division and an unnecessary waste of energy.

In that connection, let me give one clear example: the application of so-called Kosovo to become a member of INTERPOL. The argument to which Pristina often resorts is that it cannot cooperate with INTERPOL because it is not a member. That falsehood is exposed by the assertion in the Secretary-General's report that we are considering today, which states that UNMIK continues to ensure communication between the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina and INTERPOL. Under the memorandum of understanding between INTERPOL and UNMIK, such cooperation has continued for more than 15 years. In fact, Pristina's campaign, openly aided and abetted by some States, whereby certain countries overtly take part in lobbying and calling on other countries to recognize Kosovo in international organizations and to vote for it, seeks to present so-called Kosovo's membership of INTERPOL as a matter of security and combating crime. That is unsubstantiated and unacceptable. It is quite obvious that there are political aspirations involved. Pristina does not want to join INTERPOL in order to combat crime but to present itself as an independent country. On the other hand, that is why we always say that every country should bear in mind that such issues have an inherent status. They are not specialist issues. Pristina did not bother to extradite Gülen's supporters to Turkey within 24 hours. It did not matter to it that it was not a member of INTERPOL. We are talking about Kosovo's attempt to misuse that organization to try and enter by the back door in order to prejudge the outcome.

The circumstances may have made the thrust of my statement sound sombre and negative. However, I would like to conclude on a positive note. At the recent Security Council open debate on strengthening multilateralism, the observer of the European Union pointed out, inter alia, that we have learned that sustainable peace always requires a negotiated political solution (see S/PV.8395). Among other matters, the Security Council often discusses that and calls on other countries to first reach a solution on external issues and then for the rest of the countries to consider the situation. As I recall, President Obama also called on all countries not to recognize Palestine until it reached an agreement with Israel. However, in the case of Serbia many countries did the opposite. Serbia could not agree more and earnestly seeks to achieve a compromise on the question of Kosovo and Metohija. We are committed to finding a mutually acceptable solution. Such a solution cannot be found without agreement between Belgrade and Pristina, just as it is not possible without the Security Council's support.

To that end, I once again call on the Security Council to help that process and to use the momentum to move forward. The divisions within the Security Council on the issue and the discussions as to whether we need UNMIK or not clearly do not help. The answer as to whether we need Security Council meetings and UNMIK will be found once we find a mutually acceptable solution. Until then, we have resolution 1244 (1999), adopted by this organ, with which we all must comply. For its part, Serbia will make the utmost effort to continue the dialogue and to reach a lasting solution that respects the interests of both the Serbian and the Albanian peoples. Let us strive to seek a compromise for the future, a lasting peace between Serbs and Albanians, the prosperity of both Serbs and Albanians and peace and stability in the entire region. Once that happens, we will not need either UNMIK or Security Council meetings on the issue.

In conclusion, we have recently been marking the centenary of the end of the First World War, in which Serbia fought on the side of the allies. Serbia paid for the great victory with many casualties. According to data from the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Serbia lost 1,247,435 people. That is 28 per cent of its population and 62 per cent of its male population aged between 18 and 55 years old. Of those killed, 845,000 were civilians. Almost every tenth victim of the First World War was Serbian. To honour those Serbian victims of the First World War, the former President of the United States Woodrow Wilson took the decision to fly the Serbian flag over the White House and all United States national institutions on 28 June 1918. A similar decision was only ever repeated once in the history of the United States, when it decided to do the same with the French flag some years later. That is why peace and

stability in the region are among Serbia's priorities: so that the victims are never forgotten and to avoid another war in the future.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to Ms. Çitaku.

Ms. Çitaku: It is a great honour to be here in the Chamber today to represent the youngest democracy in South-Eastern Europe. We are gathered here only days after we all commemorated the centennial of the end of the First World War. As the stories of the few remaining witnesses to that dark chapter of human history recently reminded us, a steep price has been paid for freedom and peace in our old continent. The aftermath of the Great War also reminds us that peace is not sustainable unless it is complemented by justice. It is no coincidence that, before the dust of that terrible war had settled, our continent was hit yet again by a peril of unprecedented proportions in the form of the Second World War, causing a staggering loss of human life.

While the nations of the Western Balkans were occasional protagonists of that conflict, more often than not we were a battleground — a stage where ideals clashed, nations brawled, lives were cut short and dreams were gutted. Following the Second World War, a most unfortunate course of events would lead our region and my dear country, Kosovo, to become the arena of the last war on the European continent. That is a war that I remember all too well. I was among the 1 million Kosovar-Albanians who were displaced and forced out of our homes as part of the ethnic cleansing campaign carried out by the Serbian military forces. One million refugees were scattered, twenty thousand women raped and tens of thousands killed. Many are still missing.

The wounds of war cannot be healed easily, especially when the aggressor — the Serbian State — continues to refuse to take responsibility for its actions. Does anyone believe that peace in Europe would have been possible if the perpetrators of the First and Second World Wars had not been held accountable for what transpired? Can anyone seriously contend that it would have been possible for the world to move on if the instigators of those wars had insisted on moral parity? There was no moral parity in the First World War, or in the Second. There is no moral parity in the Kosovo war either. There is an oppressor and the oppressed, and we are all acutely aware of who the oppressor is.

Unfortunately, the President of Serbian only recently visited Kosovo. Instead of using the visit to send messages of peace, the Serbian President praised Milošević — the person in charge of instigating the most terrible tragedies in Europe since the World Wars. Yet we Kosovars refuse to be defined by our painful past alone. Instead, we choose to identify ourselves with our capacity to build a better future. We are not yesterday's victims; we are today's champions. We are the nation of Majlinda Kelmendi, Distria Krasniqi and all of the young women who have elevated Kosovo to the highest pedestals of the Olympics by relying solely on their own abilities.

We are a nation of youngsters who refuse to accept failure, who, when given the chance to perform, raise the bar for everyone else. We are a young republic that has been recognized by the majority of the free nations of the world. We are relentless and resolute in repelling every desperate attempt by our northern neighbour to undo our accomplishments. And should they try, they will undoubtedly fail.

Kosovo is its own entity and the President of Kosovo has the legitimate right to visit any part of Kosovo without asking for permission from anyone. There was no incident on the day President Thaçi visited Lake Ujman. As the Kosovo Force confirmed, the incident unfortunately occurred the day after, when the Serbian bar owner who offered coffees to the President and his team was attacked with a bomb by Serbian parallel structures from the north.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of the Caribbean countries that have reconfirmed their recognition of Kosovo's independence and sovereignty. On behalf of the people of Kosovo, I also want to humbly express our gratitude to each and every delegation sitting around this table for everything they have done for the people of Kosovo. Dozens of statements and resolutions adopted in this Chamber have made Kosovo a better place, and the Council was our voice in our darkest hour of need.

However, we need to acknowledge that the world has since changed. Kosovo has changed. It is no longer 1999; it is 2018. Kosovo has moved on and it is long overdue for the Council to do the same on the matter of Kosovo. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is not a peacekeeping mission anymore, and it is certainly not an administrative mission. The most instructive

illustration of the point that I am trying to make and convey is resolution 1244 (1999) itself. I urge members of the Council to go back and read it again. Read it and the Council will be baffled to find that it refers to an alternate reality, a world that ceased to exist a long time ago. Kosovars as a people have been on the receiving end of the United Nations helping hand. We believe that the Organization's resources can be put to much better use in offering solutions to more troubling problems and crises around the world.

As far as Kosovo is concerned, I implore the Council to consult the ruling of the International Court of Justice, which, I might add, was written upon the request of none other than Serbia itself. The ruling is precise and unambiguous. It states that Kosovo did not break any international laws when it declared its independence one decade ago. Those facts and realities are indisputable and irreversible. They will not change now or ever. Kosovo is independent, and it is here to stay, now and forever.

These meetings do not help peace. These meetings do not help dialogue. Unfortunately, this Chamber is being misused. It is being turned into a theatre, a platform to fuel our own domestic audiences. It is being used and misused for our own domestic audiences, and we should not allow that.

Kosovo has undergone a process of painful growth through which it has come to realize that independence is not sufficient in and of itself. While we rejoice and take immense pride in the individual accomplishments of our champions in sports, the arts and science, our institutions have a long way to go in order to meet the rightful expectations of the Kosovar people. Our Government must do much more to provide higher quality education, better welfare and more opportunities for its people. It must also go the extra mile in combating corruption, nepotism and other negative phenomena that plague our young republic.

However, while some battles are ours to fight internally, we will be able to meet other challenges only if we are completely integrated into the global community. Kosovo cannot be expected to effectively battle transnational crime if it is not part of INTERPOL. Kosovo cannot, and should not, be a black hole in the middle of the European continent. We are prepared and willing to help make not only Kosovo, but our entire region and Europe at large, safer for its inhabitants. The Kosovo Police Force — and here the United Nations should take pride because it helped us to establish it, 19 years ago — meets all the conceivable criteria for a credible partner in the fight against transnational crime. It has already helped foil international terrorist plots and curtail violent extremist groups. It has also signed over 80 bilateral agreements of cooperation with counterpart law enforcement agencies around the world.

However, in order to become a proper contributor to regional and global security, Kosovo must become a member of INTERPOL. That is what membership is about. Frankly speaking, I do not know how on Earth such an outcome would be a loss for our neighbour. I really do not know. The matter is not a zero-sum game; it is quite the opposite, actually. In this day and age, it is irresponsible to pretend that our nations are not deeply affected by what happens beyond our borders. We should view our growing interconnectedness as a reason to increase cooperation. The fact of the matter is that those who obstruct Kosovo's membership in INTERPOL are implicitly aiding organized crime. It is evident that the only parties who stand to benefit from keeping Kosovo out of INTERPOL are criminals, drug cartels and terrorists. The question that must be asked is: do we really want to be on that list?

The same principle applies to the establishment of Kosovo's armed forces. First and foremost, I must emphasize that Kosovo has not engaged in building an army with the intention of threatening to fight or invade any land. That is not something we do. We are actually transforming the mandate of our existing security forces in order to make them compatible to contribute to regional and global security to the full extent of their potential. Our soldiers and officers have excelled in every single international competition that they have participated in, proving that they are ready to give back. Moreover, we are proud to have the second most diverse security force relative to all NATO members. In Kosovo we perceive our diversity as a source of strength. It is an attribute that we cherish and want to preserve. Hence it is a matter of concern to see Serbian members of the Kosovo Security Force be subjected to intense campaigns of intimidation, which are not limited to the members themselves but affect their families as well. The Serbian State and its proxies have left no stone unturned in their endeavour to stop the process of the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force.

But let me be clear: no State other than Kosovo, no other citizens than those of Kosovo, have veto power over the establishment of our armed forces. The issue is a matter of sovereign decision, one which Kosovo shall conclude soon. And again, allow me to be completely candid: the matter is not something on which we will ever have a dialogue with Serbia. Also, as the Council is well aware, the decision is in no way a violation of resolution 1244 (1999).

While we are on the topic of the dialogue, I feel it is necessary for me to reiterate, on behalf of the Government of Kosovo, that our country remains committed to fulfilling all the arrangements previously agreed to in Brussels with Serbia. However, as the expression goes, it takes two to tango, and Serbia is not holding up its end of the bargain. It has consistently failed to deliver on almost everything that we have agreed upon, from its disregard for the energy agreement, which is costing Kosovo millions on an annual basis, to its unwillingness to recognize Kosovar diplomats, and many other matters that are hindering normal interactions for citizens in both our countries. Furthermore, Serbia has been in violent breach of the Central European Free Trade Agreement with Kosovo, dumping its products in order to destabilize our markets. As such, Kosovo's imposition of a 10 per cent tariff on Serbian products was unavoidable. It is both an economically and a politically sensible measure. Our Minister for Trade and Industry has sent dozens of letters to his counterparts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia, letters that were never answered.

That of course brings us back to the necessity of dialogue with Serbia. We all agree that dialogue is the only path forward for our two countries. Nonetheless, it is crucial for us to also agree on what that dialogue is, and what it will never be about. That dialogue is not about debating Kosovo's right to exist as a free nation under the sun; rather, it is principally and exclusively about peace, reconciliation and mutual recognition. As such, the dialogue will have meaning and produce results only if we decide to speak in earnest with our own domestic audiences about the process in Brussels. Beyond the agreements and papers signed, it is essential that our neighbours begin to treat us as human beings, equal in every dimension and endowed with the same inalienable rights and freedoms.

Dialogue is very important, but we in Pristina are the ones who decide. We — not people in Belgrade — decide who represents us. We are proud that we represent the generation that fought Slobodan Milošević. Fatmir Limaj was acquitted twice by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, at The Hague. And we in Kosovo can look back very calmly at our own past and not be ashamed of it.

Just two months ago, an 18-year-old boy from Kosovo was beaten and hospitalized in Serbia because someone on the streets of Serbia heard him speak the Albanian language on the phone. Thankfully, that time he survived. Not long ago, an infant — a baby — was about to die because Serbian air traffic control refused to grant a permit for the use of its airspace to a plane that was due to land in Pristina. Indulge me for a moment and think about this — Serbian air traffic control officials refused to grant a permit for the use of airspace to a plane because it was headed for Pristina, even when it could have saved a baby's life. That behaviour is beyond comprehension. In another instance, dozens of buses carrying Kosovo Albanians were attacked with stones as they passed through Serbia because Kosovo was their destination. Another case in point is the Kosovar artists and scholars who are banned from entering Serbia in the first place, even though the purpose of their travel to Belgrade is to promote peace and dialogue. Such issues transcend politics. However, they are exceptionally more hurtful when the State is complicit. An innocent infant was about to die in the sky in September because Serbian authorities refused to grant a simple request by an international aircraft operator.

We can agree or disagree on various and numerous counts, but we cannot and will not discuss placing a price tag on human life. There are no circumstances that can justify that horrendous notion becoming the subject of negotiation. In fact, it is shameful that a European Union candidate country is utilizing such despicable tools to make a political point. An agreement between States can be meaningful and sustainable only if it is an agreement between people that brings about more secure peace and better living standards for those involved — not if it triggers the opposite outcome. Our northern neighbours may have their doubts. However, we in Kosovo know exactly where we stand, where we are headed and where we belong — in Europe. We are reminded of that every day by our brave and courageous journalists who work fiercely to hold our politicians to account. We are constantly reminded of that by our athletes, men and in particular, women, who defy the odds and bring gold medals back home. We are reminded of that by our vibrant youth who excel

in science and technology, explore new frontiers and experiment with cutting-edge innovations to find answers to the questions of the future.

We are reminded of that by brave women like Vasfije Krasniqi. Vasfije was only 16 years old when she was taken from the arms of her mother by Serbian military forces in the spring of 1999. She was raped. They did not kill her because, as she herself has testified, they explicitly told her "you will all suffer more if we keep you alive". Little did they know that Vasfije would grow up to become an incredible woman, a mother of two beautiful daughters, and nearly two decades later she would return home stronger and braver than ever to teach all of us a lesson about justice. That lesson is about the justice that was once denied to her. It is a lesson of perseverance — about never giving up. Despite the best efforts to make Vasfije a victim, she is not one. She is a hero. And heroes like her define my country. The lessons of war still speak to us, reminding us that progress must never be taken for granted. Kosovo has borne witness to the worst of humankind. We live in the absence of justice for the dead, the wounded, the raped and the missing. Remorse cannot do justice to such suffering. We believe that every act of aggression, terror, cruelty and oppression must have repercussions, for hatred shall never prevail.

As Kosovars, we have a responsibility to do better. We are determined to honour the lives that might have been by ensuring that their sacrifice was not made in vain. Their memory has fuelled our transformation and empowered our sense of purpose. They have inspired our collective commitment to realizing the dreams of the fallen and our persistent efforts to pursue a future of enduring peace and prosperity. We know that those ideals are not easy to achieve, but they are nonetheless worth striving for. However daunting the odds may be and however big the challenges may seem, everyone can rest assured that Kosovo will never give up. We are a young republic, one that is far from perfect, but also one that will not stop striving to become better for all its citizens, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. Because that is how we keep our promise to our children. That is the Kosovo we are fighting for.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I thank Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, for his comprehensive update on the reporting period based on the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/981).

The current state of affairs in Kosovo requires the continued attention of the Security Council as a matter on its current agenda. Our priorities in that regard should be to continue promoting dialogue between the parties, as well as confidence-building measures in the political-military, socioeconomic and human dimensions, in compliance with resolution 1244 (1999) and under the auspices of the European Union (EU) and with the involvement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other relevant regional organizations to maintain comprehensive and sustainable security and development in Kosovo. In that regard, Astana supports the initiatives and concerted efforts of the global community, including the United Nations, the OSCE and the EU, aimed at achieving mutually acceptable conditions for resolving the situation in Kosovo. We consider it important for the parties to adhere to the agreements previously reached through the mediation of international organizations. Kazakhstan commends the steps by Belgrade and Pristina under the auspices of the European Union High Representative Federica Mogherini for continuing dialogue by holding a series of technical-level meetings in Brussels. We positively note that both leaders met in person in Brussels on 8 November.

At the same time, taking note of the 29 September incident related to the Gazivode reservoir, we strongly believe that both parties should avoid any steps leading to further tensions and instability. Kazakhstan also considers it highly important to thoroughly study the issue of border delineation, which was reintroduced by both leaders of the two parties as part of their continued efforts to reach a comprehensive agreement on the normalization of relations, as it has the potential to bring about a negative effect on existing peace and stability in the region.

There are still a number of sensitive issues left to be resolved, such as the lack of inter-community trust and a large number of persons still missing. Of equal critical importance is the protection of vulnerable groups, including the Roma and the Ashkalija, and the cultural heritage and diversity in Kosovo. To that end, Kazakhstan calls both parties to strengthen their political will to further normalize relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

Without neglecting the importance of a political settlement of the situation in Kosovo, we consider it instrumental to tackle the issue through the nexus of security and development leading to sustainable socio-economic recovery of Kosovo. In that vein, there is a need to implement resolution 2250 (2015), on youth, peace and security, and provide full support and access to the youth of all ethnicities to education and skills-development to fulfil their potential, as young people are a key determinant in preventing conflicts and a vital driver of future peace and development in the region.

In addition, we need to pay special attention to the implementation of the resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and subsequent resolutions for enhancing gender equality and empowerment. Our delegation welcomes the efforts of UN-Women and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in promoting social stability in the region, which can be achieved only with the full engagement of the United Nations country team, regional organizations and civil society groups working towards peacebuilding and conflict prevention and mediation in Kosovo. We note the positive work of UNMIK on the question of returning refugees and displaced persons, together with their resettlement. We call to strengthen the international work on the matter.

We believe that peace and stability in this part of the world will be achieved only if the parties continue to fulfil their commitment in the good spirit of mutual respect, understanding and compromise. To that end, Kazakhstan firmly believes that long-lasting peace and stability in Kosovo could be achieved if the parties follow agreements, while focusing on promoting inter-community dialogue and trust, mutual respect and understanding.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Let me thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing and for all the good work he and his team continue to do in Kosovo and the region. I also welcome His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Serbia and Her Excellency the Kosovo Ambassador to Washington, D.C.

We fully support the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) and recognize the important role that UNMIK has played in post-conflict stabilization and reconciliation. The situation in Kosovo has indeed changed dramatically since the Mission's inception, two decades ago. We believe the Security Council needs to use its resources effectively. It needs to refocus UNMIK's efforts so that the means deployed by the United Nations are tailored fully to the situation on the ground. To that end, the United Kingdom supports and looks forward to a strategic review of the Mission. I would recall for members that the European Union (EU) and other regional organizations are also very closely involved in Kosovo and in the region. The EU's role is vital to enabling true peace, security and stability on the ground.

With the efficiency and priorities of the Council in mind, we welcome the reduction in frequency of UNMIK discussions. The Foreign Minister singled out my country, so I will take a few, brief minutes to respond. It is important that the cycle of discussion in the Council reflects reality on the ground. We all agreed on that at the point when we took the decision. It is also important that the reporting cycles of the Secretary-General reflect the frequency of the Council's discussion. But on the Foreign Minister's specific points, we offered four options to reach an agreement with his country — and all four were rejected. We also made it very clear that we would hold a meeting on Kosovo in the Security Council if there were progress on normalization. Sadly, there was no progress on normalization. Instead, I am sorry to say, the Serbian Government orchestrated a protest outside our Embassy in Belgrade, which is simply not an acceptable way of conducting diplomatic relations.

As we reflect on the progress Kosovo has made since UNMIK's installation in 1999, there is an example of how far Kosovo has moved forward that I would like to raise, and that concerns the Kosovo police. The Kosovo police is a professional organization that since its inception, in 1999, has taken responsibility for ensuring the maintenance of the rule of law in the long term. Its officers are well trained, and they are keen to cooperate internationally in our joint efforts to combat serious and organized crime and terrorism.

The United Kingdom hopes that the Kosovo police is voted into INTERPOL during its General Assembly session next week. We urge other members to support the Kosovo police bid. That is not about political point-scoring, it is about our collective security and fight against organized crime. Kosovo's inclusion would facilitate information-sharing among law enforcement in the Western Balkans and beyond, and that would enhance the stability of us all, including Serbia's. It

is time that we stop transnational organized criminals cooperating better than our own police services.

I would just like to add the point that I knew Oliver Ivanović and considered him a friend. We too hope that the perpetrators of his murder will be brought to justice. Oliver worked tirelessly to try to normalize the status of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. I think the greatest tribute that both countries could pay to Oliver would be to continue his work without conditions.

We continue to encourage both Serbia and Kosovo to make progress towards a sustainable solution through the EU-facilitated dialogue. We agree with both speakers that progress on the dialogue is vital for stability, security and prosperity in the two countries and the region. But I am sorry to say that this is not always the way in which dialogue is approached. We would like to see much more progress and faster, and we would like the two sides to always keep in mind that any proposals they put forward really do enhance stability on the ground and the safety and security of all their citizens.

We have had a number of rounds of dialogue in the past. In this century alone there was an attempt in 2006 under the auspices of the United Nations, to resolve the status issue that recommended Kosovo be independent. that was blocked. There was an attempt in 2007 among the EU, the United States and Russia to the same end. That too was blocked. Now we have the EU- facilitated dialogue. I cannot stress too strongly how important it is that that dialogue makes real progress if the region, and in particular Kosovo and Serbia, are to realize prosperity, security and stability.

The people of Kosovo and Serbia have elected their leaders to best represent their interests. We urge those leaders to do so. Provocative acts and rhetoric from both sides are deeply unhelpful and antagonistic and should be stopped. They are contrary to the spirit of normalization and they simply make finding common ground more difficult. We believe that both countries now need to focus on a deliverable and sustainable normalization agreement through the EU-facilitated dialogue, which enhances security and benefits the ordinary people of both countries. The United Kingdom stands ready to support such an agreement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome the participation in today's meeting of Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, and we share the serious concerns he has expressed about the situation in Kosovo. We once again listened attentively to Ms. Vlora Çitaku. We thank Special Representative Zahir Tanin and his team for their work and for his objective briefing on the activities of the Mission, which shows that the serious, deep-seated problems in Kosovo continue and require urgent solutions and the oversight of the international community.

We are not impressed by the rosy picture that some in this Chamber continue to paint in meeting after meeting. We have been compelled to conclude that the European Union (EU)-mediated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina remains mired in a deep conceptual crisis, as the lack of any tangible results from the contacts between the parties confirms. There is still no progress towards the ambitious declared goal of drafting a comprehensive agreement on the normalization of relations. The main flaw is that the key agreement reached previously on establishing an association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo is not being implemented. This is the sixth year since the signing of the document, but Pristina has been sabotaging the process while the Serbian side has consistently upheld all of its commitments. Some examples of that are the integration of Serbian judges and prosecutors into the Kosovo justice system, the inclusion of Serbian police officers in the north of the province in a Kosovo-wide structure and the allocation of a territorial dialling code for Kosovo.

We note the constructive position that Belgrade has taken and the efforts of the Serbian side to find mutually acceptable solutions. It seems, however, that Pristina is hoping that under pressure from outside, Serbia will recognize Kosovo's so-called independence. On top of that, its response to the Serbian leadership's recent compromise proposals came in the form of Kosovo-Albanian leaders' laying unilateral claim to large areas of southern Serbia. We want to point out that over and over again, Pristina makes provocative moves as soon as the possibility of resuming the negotiation process arises. The latest example is the Kosovo-Albanian authorities' recent imposition of a 10 per cent duty on goods from Serbia in defiance of existing agreements, including in the context of the Central European Free Trade Agreement. Moreover, it was achieved through Pristina's abuse of its function as Chair of the Agreement, which it participates in only indirectly,

through the Mission, as resolution 1244 (1999) strictly stipulates.

The situation in Kosovo is seriously worrying. In September alone, the province teetered on the brink of a relapse into conflict twice. That could have had disastrous consequences for the entire Balkan region. On 8 September, Kosovo Albanians took aggressive action in trying to prevent the passage of Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić to a Serbian-populated village in northern Kosovo, while on 29 September, Kosovo's so-called President, Hashim Thaçi, visited the Gazivode reservoir without prior agreement with the leaders of the Serbian municipality of Zubin Potok. These were nothing but provocative acts that worsened the already extremely low level of trust in the region.

We are disappointed by the passivity of the various relevant international structures, particularly the Kosovo Force (KFOR), which is directly responsible for maintaining peace and security in the province. We also want to point out that the incursion by armed Kosovars into the north of the region was a direct violation of the agreements reached with the participation of NATO and the EU. We are particularly alarmed by Pristina's efforts to transform the Kosovo security forces into fully fledged armed forces with the support of the NATO countries in KFOR. We have repeatedly drawn the international community's attention to the fact that these little infringements are direct gross violations of resolution 1244 (1999), which stipulates that the only presence permitted in Kosovo is of multinational contingents under international control. The Kosovo-Albanian authorities are already announcing the deployment of one garrison of the future army to northern Kosovo, which is a direct route to conflict. We urge both Pristina and its international patrons to stop before it is too late.

The slow pace of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the region remains unsatisfactory. The daily attacks on Kosovo Serb homes and property and the cases of arson, physical damage and acts of vandalism continue. Ensuring the reliable protection of Orthodox structures in Kosovo needs especially careful attention. Kosovars' usurpation of Serbian Orthodox Church property continues, and in particular, the church of Saint John the Baptist and the Saint Paraskeva Pyatnitsa chapel in the town of Peć are no longer listed in the local land register as Serbian Orthodox Church property. There have been attempts to build illegally in UNESCO-protected areas near churches and monasteries. The international presence in Kosovo, particularly the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), must keep the situation in this area under control. In addition, the province is still a breeding ground for recruiting radicals. Any attempts to put that problem on the back burner could be very costly for the Balkans and for Europe as a whole, especially considering that terrorists fleeing Syria and Iraq are returning there.

We have to once again conclude that the Specialist Chambers for prosecuting crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army insurgents has not begun its real work, although it has already appointed its third Prosecutor. This story looks more and more like a mockery aimed at winding up the investigation into the atrocities uncovered by the Council of Europe Special Rapporteur Dick Marty. All those guilty of serious crimes must be brought to justice and duly punished, regardless of the positions they hold. There has also been no progress in clarifying the circumstances surrounding the murder in January of the Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović. We believe that has to do with the fact that despite Belgrade's legitimate demands, for some incomprehensible reason the investigation of the crime was handed over wholly to Pristina.

A solution to the Kosovo problem must be found by the parties themselves on the basis of our unanimously adopted resolution 1244 (1999). The final agreement must be reliable, with the proper international legal form, and must have the broad support of the international community. Despite our colleagues' assurances that they support the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, we continue to see attempts to push for Kosovo's membership in international organizations. In particular, major efforts are being made, including through financial leverage aimed at specific countries, to round up a few more votes in support of Kosovo's INTERPOL application. That is undermining the mutual trust between the parties even more and may have a destructive effect on INTERPOL's work, as happened before with the World Customs Organization.

It is clear to us that considering the serious problems in the province and the realities on the ground, the international community's attention to the situation in Kosovo must not be distracted. We deplore the fact that the quarterly meeting on Kosovo scheduled for August did not take place. I am obliged to respond to my British colleague, who told us about four options for holding a meeting on Kosovo in August. We have another reading

of that proposal, which is that our British colleagues, who presided over the Council in August, simply blew off the meeting altogether. We believe it is essential to maintain the quarterly Security Council meetings on Kosovo and specifically to hold them in an open format. It is also essential to maintain the budget and staffing parameters of UNMIK, which plays an important role in Kosovo as, essentially, the objective eyes and ears of the international community, as well as doing important work in the area of intercommunal reconciliation. We want to point out that the Security Council alone is authorized to make decisions about the fate of UNMIK, as provided for in resolution 1244 (1999).

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank our former colleague Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his comprehensive briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on UNMIK (S/2018/981). I also reiterate our full support to him in carrying out his mandate. We highly value the vital role that the United Nations has played over the past years in helping Kosovo build its institutions and implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1244 (1999). I also welcome His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and Her Excellency Ms. Vlora Çitaku, Ambassador of Kosovo to the United States in Washington, D.C., and thank them for their statements. I will focus in my statement on political and security developments in Kosovo.

With regard to political developments, we welcome and support all the efforts and endeavours of the Republic of Kosovo to promote its stability, security, the rule of law, justice, development and the building of State institutions in the country. We also support its efforts to conduct dialogue with the European Union and achieve integration with it, as well as to implement all signed agreements between Kosovo and Serbia to reach permanent solutions to pending problems and establish good-neighbourly relations while attaining regional security and stability.

We commend the recent steps taken by Kosovo to achieve rapid and more consistent progress in the implementation of the European reform agenda. We also commend its full commitment to meeting its obligations under this agenda, especially that Kosovo has met all requirements to become part of the Schengen Zone, which was announced on 18 July by the Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship of the European Commission.

We urge Pristina and Belgrade to work together to finalize the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, as that is extremely important for building trust and confidence between both parties. The high-level European Union-facilitated dialogue in Brussels between Belgrade and Pristina remains the most appropriate framework for settling all outstanding issues. It is the principal means for reaching lasting, just and consensual solutions. We look forward to the work of both parties over the coming months with regard to adopting a legally binding agreement under international law to normalize relations between Belgrade and Pristina, in particular concerning the delineation agreement. We call for the inclusion of all social groups in that process.

With regard to security developments, we are concerned about renewed tensions between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Government of Kosovo caused by construction in the protected zone neighbouring the Visoki Dečani Monastery. We call on both parties to commit to the protection of religious heritage, and we stress the need to address such issues in line with the legislation and decisions of Kosovo's Implementation and Monitoring Council.

We note with concern the failure to reach any findings concerning the death of Kosovo-Serb politician Oliver Ivanović, on 16 January, which will prevent fostering trust among all communities across Kosovo. We look forward to seeing cooperation between both parties that will ensure the return of refugees, the recovery of their property, allocation of land to build houses, establishing security and providing social and economic opportunities — the absence of which will negatively affect sustainable return.

In conclusion, the international community must continue to make efforts to urge Pristina and Belgrade to overcome their differences in order to reach consensual, mutually acceptable, sustainable and just solutions leading to peace and stability in the region. UNMIK must continue its constructive work with Pristina, Belgrade and all parties in Kosovo to promote security, stability and respect for the human rights. Kosovo will need to make further efforts to strengthen the rule of law and end corruption and organized crime, as well as settle bilateral disputes and establish dialogue

between Belgrade and Pristina, while complying with the strategy of the European Commission on the Western Balkans.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): We thank Special Representative Tanin for his briefing. We appreciate his service and contributions to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). We also thank Foreign Minister Dačić and Ambassador Çitaku for being here today.

The United States applauds the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo for their expressions of commitment to normalization between their countries. We hope to see that normalization dialogue continue to intensify. Neither side should engage in any effort to undermine its legitimacy, including diplomatic recognition of the other side. That has no place in a genuine commitment to normalization.

Now is the time for both parties to be flexible in reaching compromises that both can agree to. The United States is committed to supporting the talks in whatever way possible. We will seriously consider any deal that is durable, implementable and sellable in both countries and that enhances stability. We urge Kosovo and Serbia to recognize the value of fully committing to normalization, which will bring great benefits to the people, the economy, the culture and peace and security of both countries. Mutual recognition and normalized relations between Kosovo and Serbia are the future. All sides will benefit from recognizing that reality and embracing it.

Considering the future of UNMIK, as we have noted many times before, we feel that the Mission has fulfilled its purpose and should draw down. We request that the Secretary-General and UNMIK initiate a strategic review to provide the members of the Security Council with critical information so that we can assess and evaluate the United Nations presence in Kosovo and ensure good stewardship of valuable United Nations Member States' time and resources. We also need to assess and develop a viable exit strategy for UNMIK. That is a principle that guides our approach to all other peacekeeping missions and should be possible with UNMIK, as well. The United States also supports the gradual transparent transition of the Kosovo Security Force into a multi-ethnic NATO interoperable military with a limited territorial defence mandate. The legislation pending before Kosovo's Assembly is fully in line with resolution 1244 (1999). It is the sovereign right of Kosovo to establish and maintain an armed force. That force, as planned, would contribute to regional and global security. We encourage all sides to avoid disinformation and provocative rhetoric about that legitimate, gradual multi-year transition.

The United States continues to encourage countries that have not yet done to join more than 110 other States Members of the United Nations in recognizing the reality of Kosovo's independence. We strongly support Kosovo's membership in all relevant international organizations, including the United Nations. We particularly encourage all INTERPOL members to support Kosovo's membership at that organization's general assembly on 20 November. Kosovo meets all membership criteria for INTERPOL. United Nations membership is not a requirement for joining INTERPOL.

Kosovo's membership in INTERPOL fundamentally is about enhancing the international law enforcement community's collective ability to combat terrorism, violent extremism, trafficking, cybercrime and other international criminal activity in the Balkan region and beyond. It is neither an impediment to the dialogue on normalization of relations nor in the international community's interest to postpone it until Serbia and Kosovo reach an agreement. UNMIK long ago ceased police functions in Kosovo. Having the Kosovo police — recognized by both Belgrade and Pristina as the sole law enforcement authority in Kosovo — join INTERPOL will no doubt strengthen international security. We urge all to support Kosovo on 20 November.

Finally, we reiterate our call on both sides to fully embrace normalization and support one another in all aspects of the enhanced relations that will come with it.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his informative briefing and work. We also welcome First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Ivica Dačić, and thank him for his statement. We are also grateful to Ms. Çitaku for her statement.

Bolivia calls for compliance with resolution 1244 (1999), including respect for the sovereignty, the territorial integrity and the independence of the Republic of Serbia. It is in that regard, and pursuant

to the resolution, that we call on all political actors to work towards an agreement in this framework, support initiatives of this kind and refrain from using provocative rhetoric. Such language is nothing but detrimental to a future agreement between Belgrade and Pristina and erodes the efforts already undertaken to build trust between the parties.

In the same vein, the creation of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, agreed upon in the Brussels Agreement more than four years ago, must be re-established in accordance with that Agreement. Although progress was made in terms of the draft statute, we are concerned that both parties maintain opposing positions regarding the powers and competencies of the association/community. We regret that this situation continues, and we urge the Kosovo authorities to respect the Agreement and to move forward on this matter in order to ensure the security and rights of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. Similarly, we call on them to refrain from any attempt to transform the Kosovo Security Force into an armed force, as doing so would constitute an act contrary to resolution 1244 (1999) and international law.

We also hope that the Kosovo authorities will fulfil their responsibilities and obligations as concerns the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the Office of the Specialist Prosecutor. We reiterate that the rule of law and its impartial application is essential to combat impunity. The persons responsible for the commission of war crimes must be held accountable for their actions, regardless of their status or background.

We also reiterate our concern about the slow progress in the investigation into the assassination of Mr. Oliver Ivanović, leader of the Civic Initiative "Freedom, Democracy, Justice". We call on the competent authorities to work on the investigation of the events that culminated in the killing of that Kosovo Serb politician on 16 January.

Bolivia takes note of the efforts by the European Union and the mediation of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to make headway in the implementation of the existing agreements. We commend her recent outreach to the parties and we appreciate that they are willing to come to a binding agreement in line with international law. It is crucial that the parties comply with the commitments entered into and, in this context, we call on the parties to work for a peaceful solution through dialogue and in line with the obligation to negotiate, as stipulated by international law.

We appreciate the work carried out by UNMIK in accordance with its mandate in the context of resolution 1244 (1999), especially its efforts in fostering intercommunity confidence-building, the rule of law and human rights. Along the same lines, we welcome the convening of the United Nations Kosovo Trust-Building Forum in Ljubljana in May and hope that the resulting recommendations will be implemented in line with the commitments assumed by the Kosovo authorities.

We also commend the work that UNMIK continues to conduct with respect to gender equality in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000). We value its joint work with the municipal authorities and representatives of the province of Kosovo to protect communities' rights, strengthen the rule of law and facilitate the return of internally displaced persons, as well as its work providing document certification services. We encourage UNMIK to continue that work.

Finally, we are concerned about the lack of funding from the trust fund established to carry out community assistance projects for the benefit of the Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali minority communities affected by lead poisoning in Kosovo. We call on the international community to join forces in order to support the fund.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and for the informative briefing by Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

We would like to welcome the presence of Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku, Ambassador of Kosovo. We also wish to highlight that the most senior officials have expressed their commitment to the dialogue facilitated by the European Union in order to normalize their relations. We emphasize the importance of involving the citizens of both countries, particularly women and young people, in building a shared vision of the future. We welcome the initiatives promoted by UNMIK and UN-Women in that regard.

We believe that, in order to consolidate and sustain peace in Kosovo and stability in the Balkan subregion, the progress made in recent months should allow a

comprehensive implementation of resolution 1244 (1999) and the Brussels Agreement. In the light of those instruments, we believe that the recent legislative initiatives on the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into an army must be carefully evaluated, considering the presence and role of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) in the country, as well as its impact on the process of political dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade.

We underline the importance of respecting and strengthening the rule of law and the trust of citizens in the institutions. In that connection, we highlight the work of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, especially in the area of promoting and protecting human rights. We underscore the need to respect the work and autonomy of the justice system to guarantee access to justice and effective accountability, thereby enabling it to fight effectively against corruption and impunity.

We also emphasize the importance of recognizing ethnic, religious and cultural diversity in order to consolidate the rule of law and make headway on pending issues, such as the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and respect for protected areas of cultural heritage.

On the other hand, we must express our concern about the risk posed to Kosovo and other countries of the subregion by the return of foreign terrorist fighters. The support of the international community is vital in that area, in accordance with the agenda promoted by the Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee.

I would like to conclude by expressing our appreciation for the work carried out by UNMIK, as well as by KFOR, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in support of building sustainable peace in Kosovo.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): We thank Ambassador Tanin for his briefing just now; we also thank High Representative Mogherini and the European Union for facilitating the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Those efforts should, in turn, be rewarded with the strong commitment from Serbia and Kosovo, in good faith, towards the normalization of their relations.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes that it is high time to recognize Kosovo's considerable progress since 2008. In that context, I will focus on three issues: first, the reporting cycle; secondly, the strategic review; and, thirdly, the rule of law.

First, the current situation in Kosovo clearly allows for a reduction of the Secretary-General's reporting cycle. We also encourage a shift of format from briefings to closed consultations. The Council set a welcome example by reducing the frequency of our discussions to twice a year. We call upon the Secretary-General to adjust his reporting cycle accordingly.

Secondly, we believe that it is possible for the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to downscale its operations. We therefore call once more for a strategic review of UNMIK, in coordination with all the relevant actors. Such a review should align the Mission to the situation on the ground.

My third and final point is on the rule of law. We appreciate Kosovo's progress in strengthening its judiciary. We welcome the launch of Justice 2020 and the functional review. Those are positive examples of efforts to increase performance and accountability. However, political will and the efforts of all strata of Kosovar society remain necessary to push forward in strengthening the rule of law and improving the daily lives of citizens. High-profile cases must be treated with the utmost scrutiny and precision. We encourage Kosovo to keep reforming its judiciary. Kosovo needs to embrace its responsibilities and ensure accountability at the national level, as we encourage the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo to hand over responsibilities to Kosovar authorities.

In conclusion, Kosovo has come a long way since its independence 10 years ago. We encourage Kosovo to keep building up its institutions. We have full faith in its ability to handle its affairs as a sovereign nation.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Representative Tanin for his presence and briefing today. I would also like to thank First Deputy Prime Minister Dačić and Ambassador Çitaku for their statements before the Council.

Poland watches the developments in Kosovo closely and we are reassured that the situation on the ground is calm, and while it may be far from perfect, it certainly does not warrant a quarterly cycle of reporting. We express a sentiment shared by other Council members when we say that there is clearly no factual justification for this frequency.

As concerns the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Poland would like to reiterate our call for a strategic review of the Mission. We are happy to see that this initiative has been taken up by other members of the Council. It has been years since a strategic review was last conducted, and it is apparent that circumstances have changed. A fresh assessment of the Mission's comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international presences in Kosovo is obviously needed. The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) has recently undergone a substantial refocusing of its mandate, reflecting the growing capacity of the host country to handle its own affairs — and so, in our view, should UNMIK.

Having recognized Kosovo, I will stick to more general remarks made from the point of view of an interested observer. Looking at the overall picture in Kosovo, we see work in progress. To be sure, much work still remains to be done, but progress is equally apparent. Whether problems may exist internally or bilaterally, none of this is outside the competence of a self-reliant independent State with functioning institutions, supported by the true engagement of its political elites.

We commend the effort of both leaders, from Belgrade and Pristina, to continue the European Union-facilitated dialogue and call on them to show consistent commitment to reaching a legally binding agreement on the comprehensive normalization of relations. The enlargement perspective set out in the strategy for the Western Balkans is feasible if enough energy is invested in going forward, rather than concentrating on the past.

Much work remains to be done in strengthening the rule of law in Kosovo. Although a lot has already been achieved, more needs to be done to combat corruption and organized crime so that the basic trust of the citizens in the State is restored and maintained.

Let me conclude with the same words that we used to conclude our statement in this Chamber six months ago (see S/PV.8254), as they remain valid. Poland regards Kosovo as being capable of managing its own future and realizing its potential within the shared framework of European values. We are ready to extend our assistance in that effort and share our experiences, as we have done so far.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for the quality of his briefing. We also welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and Ambassador Vlora Çitaku of Kosovo.

My country welcomes the great progress that has been made in Kosovo in recent years in the political, security and economic spheres, thanks to the support of the international community and the outstanding work of the UNMIK staff in supporting the Government's efforts for reconciliation among the various communities and a return to peace and stability in the country. My country also welcomes the full commitment of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo to the consolidation of multi-ethnic, transparent and democratic institutions in the country since 2008. That commitment has strongly contributed to the return to institutional normalcy and stability, as evidenced by the successful organization of municipal elections on 22 October and 19 November 2017.

My delegation notes with satisfaction the ratification in March by the Parliament of Kosovo of the bilateral agreement on the demarcation of the border between Kosovo and Montenegro, which was signed in September 2015. However, it remains concerned about the paucity of progress in the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Côte d'Ivoire therefore urges those two countries to overcome their differences and give priority to cooperation, particularly within the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement, in order to stimulate their economic development.

On the security front, my delegation welcomes the efforts that have been made by the Kosovo Force (KFOR) since 1999 to contribute to the maintenance of a safe and secure environment in Kosovo and ensure the free movement of goods and persons. My country notes with regret the slow progress of the investigations into the murder on 16 January of Mr. Oliver Ivanović, the leader of the civic initiative "Serbia, democracy, justice". It therefore encourages the Kosovar authorities to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the perpetrators of that crime are apprehended and brought before the competent courts.

We take this occasion to welcome the indictment by the Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor's Office on

5 October of seven individuals planning terrorist attacks in Serb-majority areas and against KFOR troops. Furthermore, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call for the rapid operationalization of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, which will undoubtedly contribute to the easing and relaxation of the sociopolitical climate.

My country would like to see the continuation of high-level meetings between the political authorities of Pristina and Belgrade, under the leadership of Ms. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in order to significantly advance reconciliation and a final settlement of the Kosovo issue. Those meetings, in addition to the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, have contributed to the significant progress made in the area of human rights and reconciliation among communities.

In conclusion, my country calls on the international community to make a significant contribution to the trust fund to support the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo.

Mr. Vaverka (Sweden): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tanin for his briefing, and welcome Foreign Minister Dačić and Ambassador Çitaku to the Council Chamber today.

Today's briefing will be Sweden's last meeting on Kosovo during our current tenure as a member of the Council. During these two years, despite challenges, important steps have been taken by Pristina and Belgrade to normalize relations and advance on their respective European Union (EU) tracks.

The future of both Serbia and Kosovo clearly lies in the European Union. The EU integration process is the most important driver of positive change and necessary reforms in the Western Balkans. We welcome the continued engagement of Pristina and Belgrade in the EU-facilitated dialogue for the normalization of relations. Full normalization is vital to a stable, peaceful and prosperous Western Balkans, and a comprehensive and legally-binding agreement must be reached as soon as possible.

Pristina and Belgrade should implement their commitments and pursue the dialogue process with constructive engagement and dedication. Important achievements, such as the integration of Kosovo Serb judges and prosecutors into Kosovo's judicial system last year, should serve as an inspiration for further progress.

The developments in the Western Balkans have a direct influence on the rest of Europe. The European Union has therefore invested heavily in the stability and prosperity of that region, both politically and financially. It is essential that the status issue not hamper the European perspective for the two countries. The normalization of Kosovo in an international context, including its membership in international organizations, must be allowed to move forward. We encourage the Government and the opposition of Kosovo to accelerate work with the necessary reforms, including the fight against corruption and organized crime, in order to advance further on the EU path.

The United Nations and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) have undoubtedly made invaluable contributions to bringing us to where we are today. Present challenges in Kosovo are, however, better dealt with in the framework of the EU integration process, including in close cooperation with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. The handover of responsibilities from UNMIK to the local authorities should continue.

UNMIK's efforts should instead be refocused so that the means deployed by the United Nations are better tailored to the situation on the ground. To that end, we would welcome a strategic review of the Mission in due course. Given the progress made in Kosovo, the current reporting cycle to the Security Council should also be adjusted to six months to better reflect the realities on the ground. That would entail two reports from the Secretary-General a year.

Since 1999, Sweden has contributed militarily, economically and politically to the stability and prosperity of Kosovo. Our political support, which is also demonstrated through our bilateral development cooperation, will continue, with a clear focus on supporting Kosovo's EU integration.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his comprehensive briefing on the latest developments in Kosovo. I also welcome the presence of Mr. Dačić, Serbian First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, at today's meeting and

thank him for his remarks. I also thank Ambassador Vlora Çitaku for her statement.

Our position on the issue at hand has always been consistent and clear. We would like to reaffirm our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and the peaceful and amicable resolution of all outstanding issues between Belgrade and Pristina in accordance with the Brussels Agreement. We also welcome the ongoing efforts made by the European Union in facilitating dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, as well as in advancing peace and stability in the region.

In that regard, we are encouraged by the continued engagement of Belgrade and Pristina in the European Union-facilitated dialogue on the normalization of relations. We are also encouraged by their determination and commitment to resolve outstanding issues through dialogue and call on both sides to remain engaged in the process.

The ongoing efforts being made to operationalize an integrated Kosovo judiciary is a welcome step. However, we are concerned about the slow progress on the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. We therefore encourage the implementation of all existing agreements in accordance with the Brussels Agreement.

We also take note of the ongoing discussion by both sides on the territorial delineation as part of a comprehensive agreement on the normalization of relations. It is our hope that leaders in both Belgrade and Pristina will continue to engage in dialogue and maintain a positive and constructive spirit with a view to addressing outstanding issues and disagreements through peaceful means. That demands that both sides refrain from actions and statements that could cause ethnic discord and exert efforts to create an atmosphere of trust and confidence conducive to dialogue that also addresses the interests of all segments of the population.

Ethiopia fully supports the work that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo has been undertaking in discharging its mandate in line with resolution 1244 (1999). Its engagement and support in promoting intercommunity reconciliation and confidence-building measures in the reporting period are commendable.

It is our hope that UNMIK will continue to promote political dialogue and strengthen community reconciliation, as well as ensuring security and stability in Kosovo and the region. We also recognize the significant role of the European Union on matters concerning Kosovo and commend the European Union Rule of Law Mission and the Kosovo Force for their valuable contribution in Kosovo in the area of the rule of law and security.

In conclusion, I would like to state that the security and stability of Kosovo and the region will ultimately be ensured once there is political will and resolve on the part of both sides. In that respect, we once again encourage both parties to remain committed to dialogue and negotiation with a view to finding a mutually acceptable solution.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to thank Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku, Ambassador of Kosovo to the United States of America, for their briefings. I would like to very respectfully recall that, in accordance with the working methods of the Security Council, such statements should not exceed 15 minutes, as recalled in paragraph 56 of note S/2017/507. In the light of the situation described by the Special Representative and the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/981), I will briefly underline three points.

The first concerns the mandate of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Notable efforts have been made to promote security, stability and respect for human rights in Kosovo and the region. That work deserves to be commended. France particularly welcomes UNMIK's activities in bringing together communities and in promoting the women, peace and security agenda in cooperation with UN-Women. However, as has been underlined by several members at previous meetings and again today, we must continue to be attentive to the issue of refocusing UNMIK's actions nearly 20 years after the adoption of resolution 1244 (1999), taking into account the situation on the ground, the performance of that peacekeeping operation and the initiatives led by other regional and international actors. I am thinking in particular of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX).

Secondly, the normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade also depends on the dialogue between the two leaders conducted under the auspices

of the European Union. In that regard, we welcome the commitment of Ms. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the most recent meeting held in Brussels on Thursday, 8 November.

France calls on both sides to show a spirit of compromise and political will. We encourage the policymakers of both States to be up to the circumstances and to create the conditions for an agreement, which would be an essential step in the long-term stabilization of the Western Balkans and in moving towards the European perspective.

Finally, my third point concerns the European future of Kosovo and Serbia, which was clarified last March in the European Union's strategy for the Western Balkans. In view of the merits at the heart of the European project, we emphasize the importance of the reforms needed to consolidate and to strengthen the rule of law. In Kosovo, EULEX contributes to that objective by focusing on the effectiveness, ethics and the multi-ethnic character of Kosovo's justice system. However, the primary responsibility lies, of course, with the policymakers.

As we commemorate the centenary of the end of the Great War, a spirit of reconciliation must prevail. We hope that Belgrade and Pristina will be able to move in that direction and reach an agreement on normalizing their relations.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his briefing on the progress made in recent months in Kosovo. I would also like to thank Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku, Ambassador of Kosovo to the United States of America, for their interventions, which I welcome.

My delegation takes note of the resumption of the European Union-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina on 18 July and separate talks with Ms. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in Brussels on 7 September. We urge the parties to continue the talks to promote the normalization of relations, since ensuring security and stability in Kosovo requires the commitment of both parties to continuing the dialogue. We therefore encourage them to continue to step up their efforts towards achieving stability on the ground, while respecting the implementation of the agreements reached.

Likewise, we note the possible agreement on territorial adjustments on which the parties are working in view of their commitment to reaching a final agreement on Kosovo. We recall that the aforementioned agreement should not only be in line with international laws but also address all the concerns of the various communities, as well as the disagreements that may arise among them. In that regard, we encourage the parties to continue to cooperate peacefully, to promote political dialogue and respect for human rights, as established in the Charter of the United Nations, and to address their differences through direct, fair and inclusive negotiations in order to find a lasting solution acceptable to all parties.

We note with concern the decision of Pristina to increase taxes on products imported from Serbia. That decision does nothing but undermine regional cooperation, increase tensions and damage overall trust among the various communities. We therefore urge the parties to step up their efforts to improve regional cooperation and the rule of law, and to promote development, peace and security in Kosovo, while safeguarding the good relations of trust among the communities there. In that regard, we call on the competent authorities to clarify as soon as possible the circumstances surrounding the murder of Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović in January.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea reaffirms its respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and deems the legitimate Serbian concerns on the question of Kosovo to be justified. We thank Serbia for its continued efforts to seek a peaceful and inclusive solution to the question of Kosovo.

Finally, we commend the excellent work that UNMIK is doing on the ground and the support that it provides to all of the communities in Kosovo and the regional and international actors, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Kosovo Force and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, in order to fulfil the mandates of resolution 1244 (1999), which is the legal basis for a just solution in Kosovo.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

China thanks Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his briefing. We support the Special Representative in leading UNMIK's implementation of its mandate. I also welcome the presence of Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, at this meeting and thank him for his briefing. I also take note of the statement delivered by Ms. Çitaku.

At present, the security situation in Kosovo is stable on the whole, but it still faces some complexities. Resolution 1244 (1999) is an important legal basis for resolving the Kosovo issue. All parties should, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and within the framework of the relevant resolutions, reach a solution that is acceptable to all through dialogue and negotiation.

China respects Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, understands Serbia's legitimate concerns on the Kosovo issue and appreciates Serbia's efforts to seek a political solution to the Kosovo issue. China welcomes the commitments made by Belgrade and Pristina to promoting the normalization of bilateral relations through dialogue and consultation. We also welcome the constructive efforts of both parties to implement the agreements already reached, gradually build mutual trust and continue to create conditions conducive to reaching a comprehensive and lasting solution.

It is in the fundamental interests of all of the ethnic groups in Kosovo to achieve reconciliation and common development, which in turn will contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in the Balkans. It is hoped that all parties concerned will put the well-being of the people first, protect the legitimate rights and interests of all ethnic groups, promote socioeconomic development and avoid words or actions that might lead to escalating tensions.

While the Council should remain seized with the Kosovo issue, the international community should play a constructive role in promoting a proper solution. We hope that UNMIK will maintain its coordination with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, the Kosovo Force and others in a joint effort to improve the situation in Kosovo and promote the due settlement of the Kosovo issue.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8400

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8400th meeting

Thursday, 15 November 2018, 9.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Mielus
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

The meeting was called to order at 9.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of South Sudan and the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/1021, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2445 (2018).

I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, on China's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We wish you every success in the discharge of your duties during the period of your presidency. I also congratulate your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Bolivia, for his own efforts at the helm of the Security Council during the month of October. I would like to reassure you of the full cooperation of my delegation.

I want to thank the Security Council for the spirit of cooperation and consensus that enabled it to adopt resolution 2445 (2018), extending the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) for six months. I thank the delegation of the United States of America, the penholder on this item, for its efforts to facilitate the negotiations that led to the adoption of that resolution.

I would like to reiterate my country's commitment to its ongoing cooperation with UNISFA in order to allow it to fully implement all elements of the mandate that was conferred on it by the Security Council in resolution 1990 (2011) and all subsequent relevant resolutions. I also underscore our resolve to cooperate with the Security Council and the penholder on this issue, the United States of America, in order to achieve our common goals of preserving and strengthening peace in Abyei, as well as establishing the pertinent mechanisms that would allow us to resolve and confirm the final status of the region.

My Government reaffirms its attachment to and respect for all conventions and agreements that have been signed with the Republic of South Sudan, foremost among which is the Agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area, signed on 20 June 2011, and the 27 September 2012 Agreement on Cooperation and Security Arrangements. I take this opportunity to emphasize the importance of the 2011 agreement, which is the cornerstone of all arrangements relating to the issue of Abyei, including the deployment of UNISFA. The two parties to the agreement — the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, which became the Government of the Republic of South Sudan in July 2011 — agreed that the 2011 agreement would remain in force until the final status of Abyei had been settled. Both parties also agreed to refrain from making any amendment to the UNISFA mandate without the approval of the three parties, namely, the Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia, the only troop-contributing country to UNISFA.

I note that the issue of Abyei should be considered in the overall framework of relations between the two brotherly countries, the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan. Recent positive developments in our relationship with South Sudan have brought us closer to a comprehensive resolution of the situation in Abyei. We hosted the peace negotiations on South Sudan that led to the peace agreement of 12 September in order to

further cooperation between the two countries in order to implement all provisions of June 2011 agreement, and set up the institutions envisaged in that agreement, including the joint administration for Abyei, the joint legislative council and the joint police force. I am sure that Council members will agree that those institutions are indispensable in order to manage the region, provide services that the people need, promote peaceful coexistence among the various elements of society, and ensure the proper conditions conducive to settling the final status of Abyei in a manner that satisfies everybody.

It goes without saying that the Abyei Protocol, which is part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, is the bedrock foundation recognized by the Security Council. The Protocol stipulates explicitly that Abyei is an integral part of Sudanese territory. It is therefore impossible to review the arrangements that are based on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement without completely recognizing this fact and the consequences thereof. It is on this basis that the Sudan agreed to settle the final status of Abyei by conducting a joint referendum.

In conclusion, I would like once again to express my appreciation and thanks to all our partners and friends, especially those in the Council, who have worked with both the Sudan and South Sudan in a spirit of sincerity and determination, and supported us in our efforts to strengthen peace. They patiently listened to my country's views on the issues included in resolution 2445 (2018), which was just adopted.

We would also like to thank those who strive to facilitate the work of UNISFA, in particular the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the African Union Peace and Security Council, the African Union Commission and the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel, as well as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan. We also thank all the staff of UNISFA. We reiterate the Sudan's determination to continue working with UNISFA in order to ensure that it can discharge all its tasks in a smooth way.

Mr. Malwal (South Sudan): I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on China's accession to presidency of the Security Council for the month of November. Our delegation is pleased and ready to work and cooperate with you during your tenure.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of South Sudan, I would like to thank the Council on its decision to renew the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei. We would like to thank the Ethiopian Government for its valuable commitment and dedication to maintaining peace and stability in Abyei. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan would like to reaffirm its commitment to keep engaging the Council in pursuit of finding a final solution to the Abyei issue. The Republic of South Sudan is determined to take advantage of the current rapprochement in the bilateral relations between the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, as well as the current positive regional developments, to reassure the communities in the Abyei area that a satisfactory solution will be found soon.

The meeting rose at 9.45 a.m.